THE YELLOW KNIGHT OF OZ

By

Ruth Plumly Thompson

FOUNDED ON AND CONTINUING

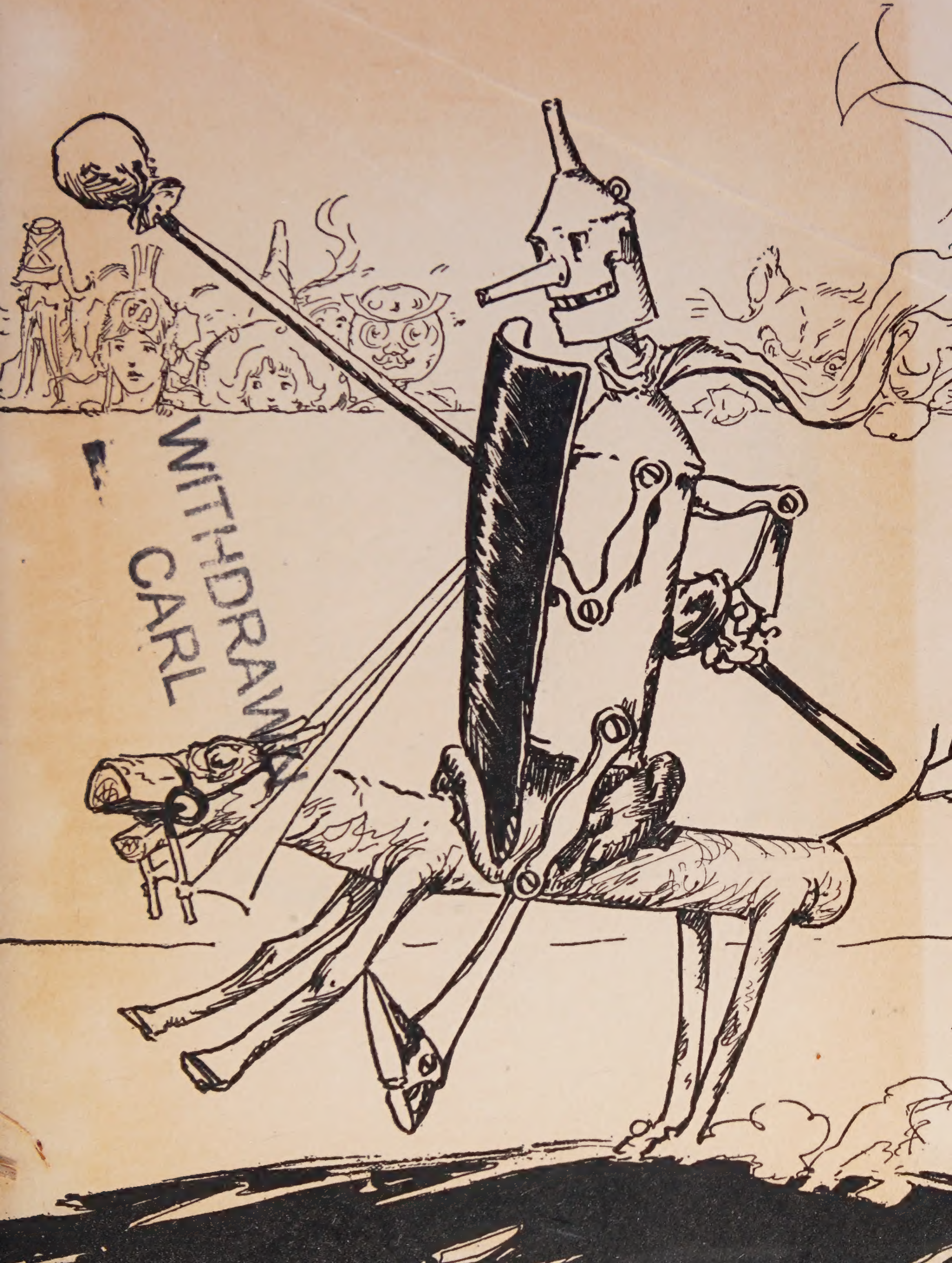
The Famous Oz *Stories*

By

L. Frank Baum

ILLUSTRATED BY JNO. R. NEILL

20-093



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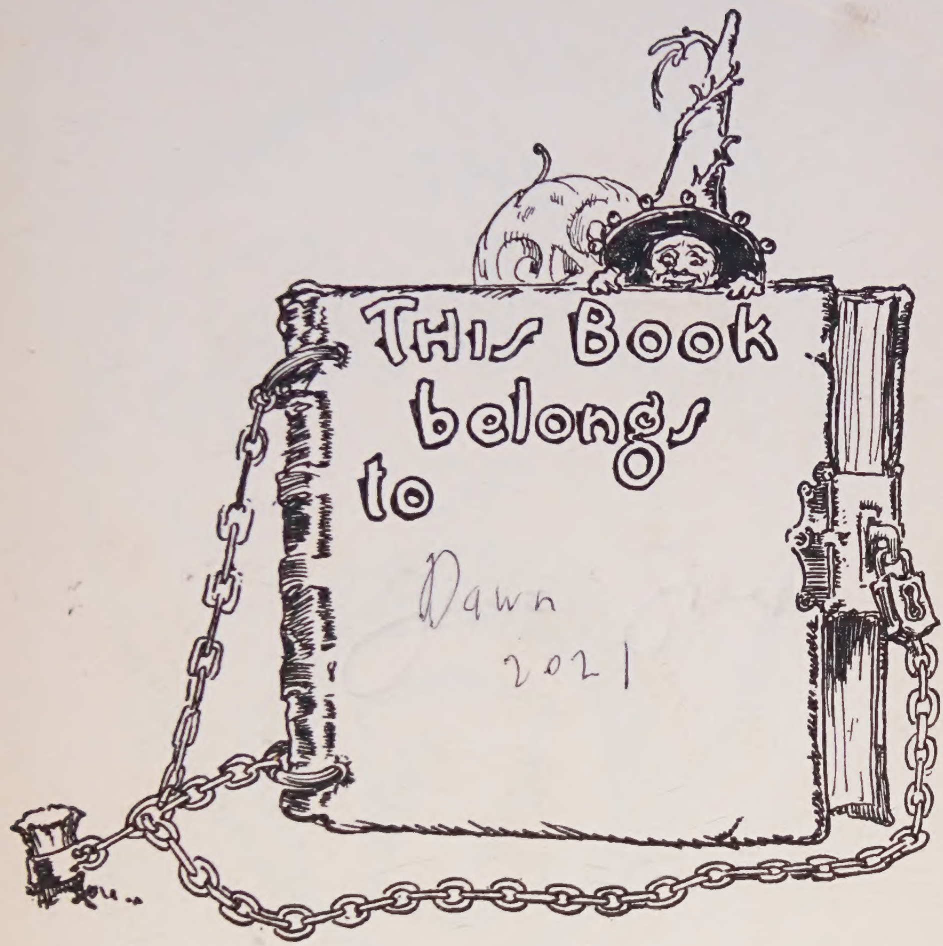

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THE Yellow Knight OF OZ

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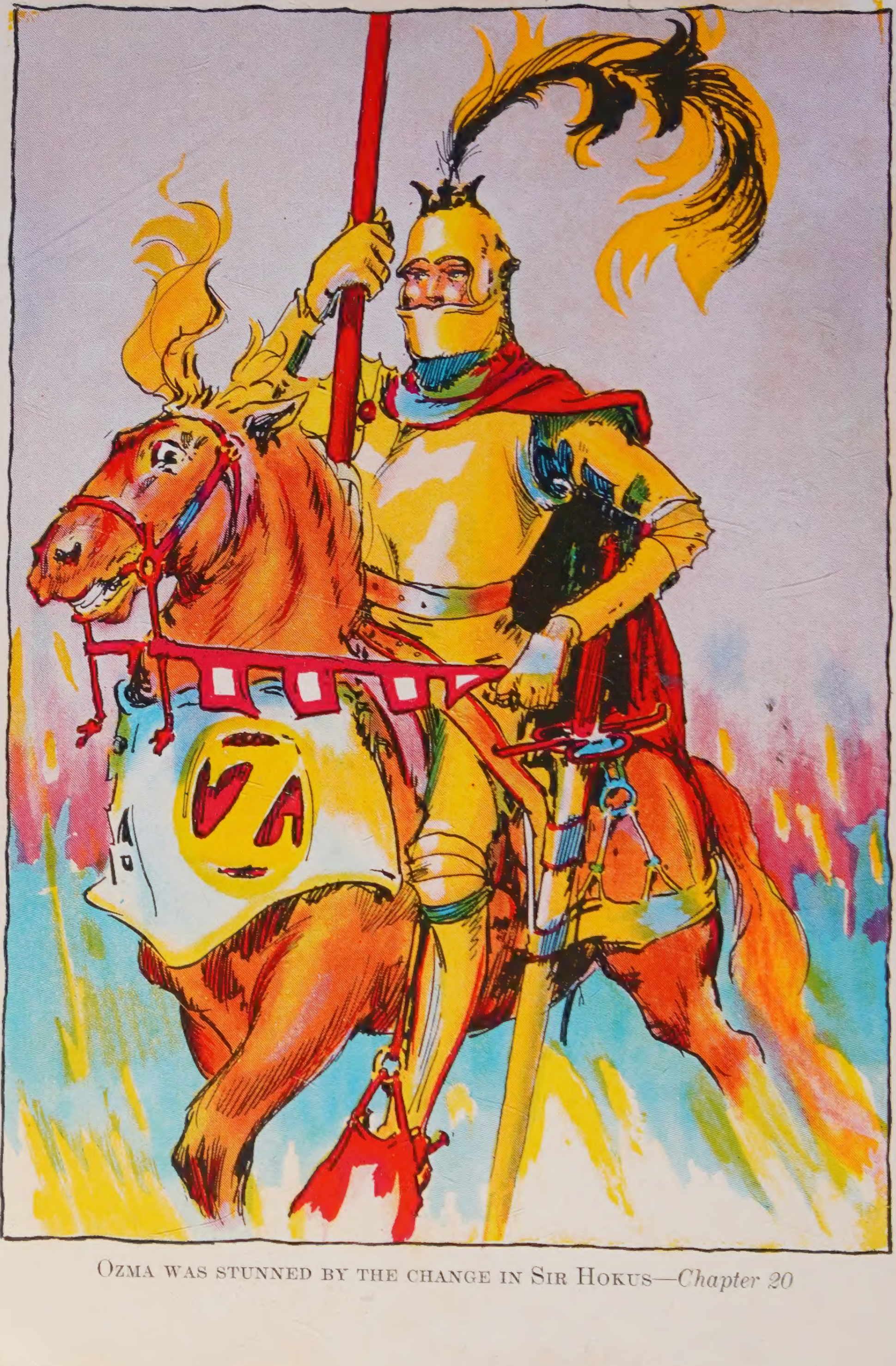

Ozma was stunned by the change in Sir Hokus—*Chapter 20*

The
YELLOW KNIGHT
of OZ

By
RUTH PLUMLY THOMPSON
Founded on and continuing the Famous Oz Stories

By
L. FRANK BAUM
"Royal Historian of Oz"

Illustrated by
JOHN R. NEILL

The Reilly & Lee Co.
Chicago New York

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Dear Boys, and Dear Girls:

The tip top of the year to you!
Good times and wishes!
Grand fun and good cheer to you!
And in this new book
Full of merry Oz folks
You may read of the quest
Of Sir Hokus of Pokes—
Of a strange Yellow Knight
And Stampedro, his horse.
There's a wicked old Shah,
And a Princess, of course.
I know I'll enjoy
All the letters you'll write
When you've finished the tale
Of this jolly old Knight.
What ho and what hey!
For adventures, I say!
And I'll write you some more
In a year and a day. (Really.)

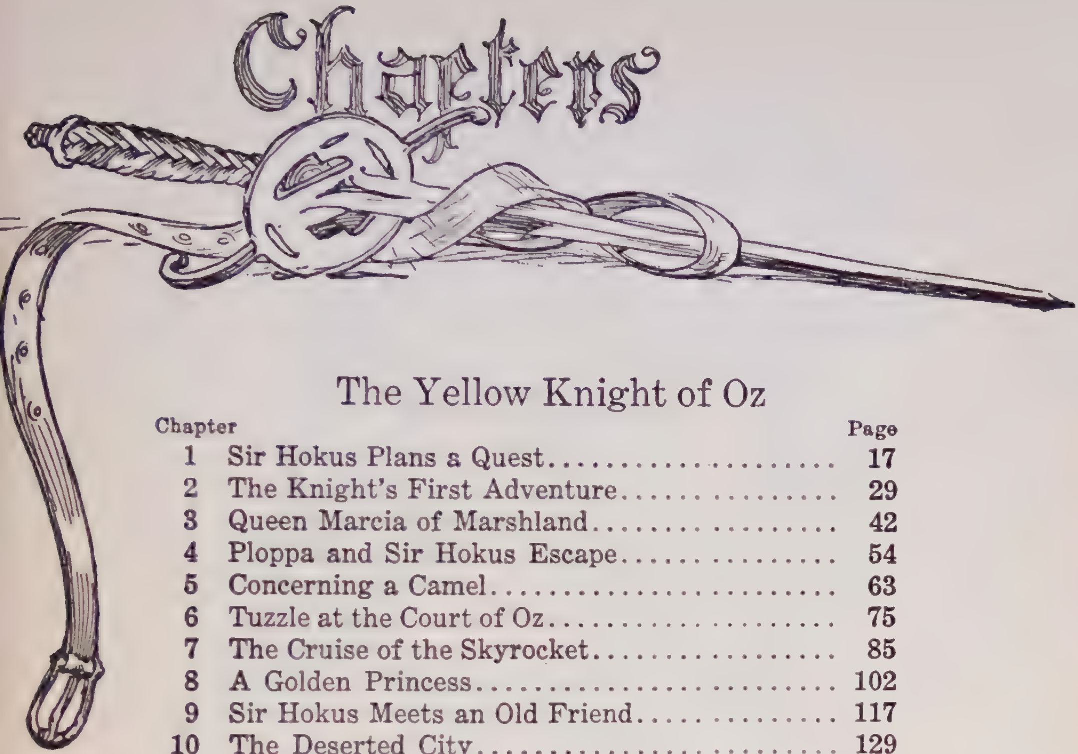
RUTH PLUMLY THOMPSON.

254 S. Farragut Terrace, West Philadelphia, Penn.

This book is dedicated to
my very dear
and very little
Aunt Gertrude!

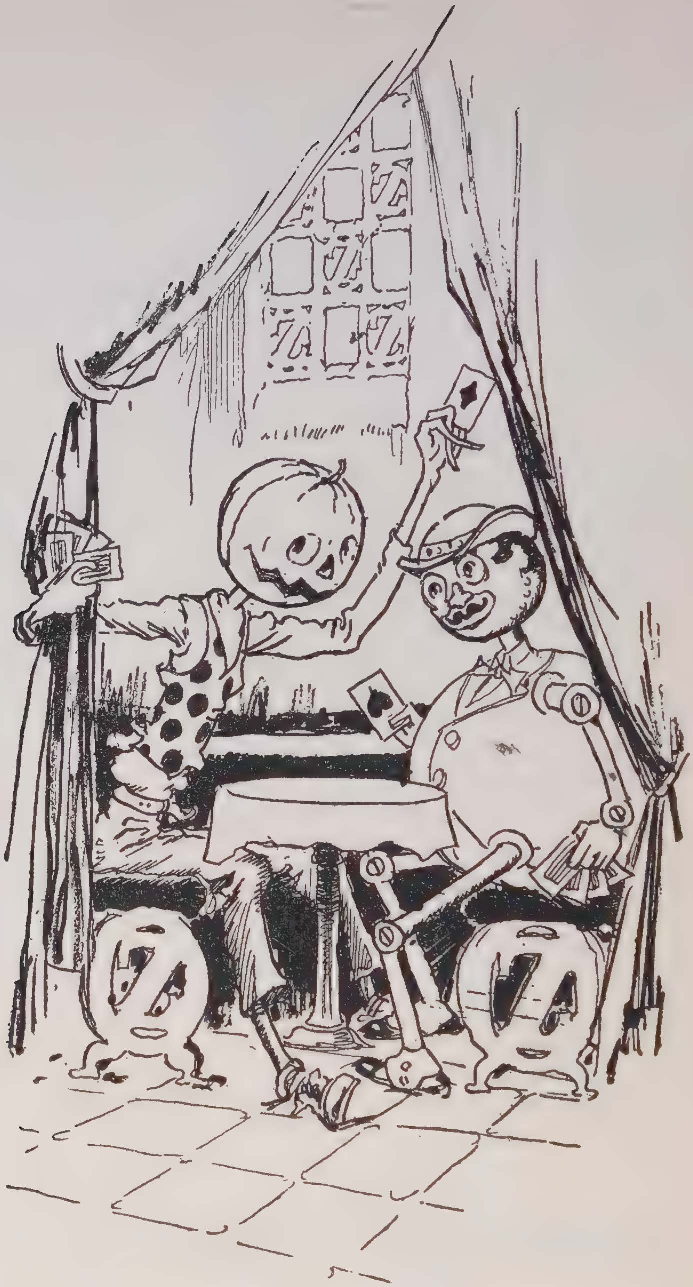
Ruth Plumly Thompson, 1930

Chapters



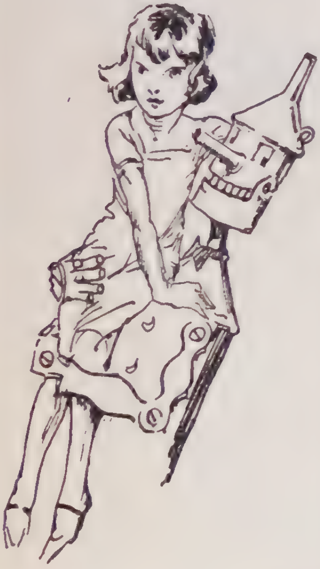
The Yellow Knight of Oz

Chapter Page
1 Sir Hokus Plans a Quest.................... 17
2 The Knight's First Adventure................ 29
3 Queen Marcia of Marshland................. 42
4 Ploppa and Sir Hokus Escape............... 54
5 Concerning a Camel........................ 63
6 Tuzzle at the Court of Oz.................... 75
7 The Cruise of the Skyrocket................. 85
8 A Golden Princess........................ 102
9 Sir Hokus Meets an Old Friend.............. 117
10 The Deserted City......................... 129
11 The Knight Loses His Camel................ 143
12 Camy at the Sultan's Court................. 151
13 King of the Quix!......................... 160
14 The Enchanted Forest..................... 174
15 Five Travellers Meet...................... 188
16 Speedy in Samandra....................... 203
17 The Restoration of Corumbia............... 219
18 The Return of the Yellow Knight............ 237
19 For the Hand of a Princess................. 251
20 The Marriage of Marygolden............... 264



SIR HOKUS PLANS A QUEST

CHAPTER ONE



"I AM minded," said Sir Hokus of Pokes, drawing aside the green curtains and looking out over the sparkling towers and spires of the Emerald City of Oz—"I am minded to go on a quest!"

"Quest?" shouted Scraps, the Patchwork Girl, handspringing over the sofa, capering up to the Knight, and collapsing in front of him with a giggle. "What manner of quest, Sir Knight? Request or conquest?

"Methinks we'll go upon a quest
East, North, or South, Sir Hoke, or West?
To slay a dragon? Or what ho!
What hey! What say? When do we go?"

"We!" Dropping the curtain, Sir Hokus looked sternly at the Patchwork Girl, then striding over to a small sofa sat solemnly down beside Dorothy, a little girl from Kansas and a Princess of Oz. The Knight and several more of Dorothy's friends were spending the evening in her cozy apartment in Ozma's palace.

"Wait till Monday," smiled Dorothy, looking up from a book she was reading. "Wait till Monday and I'll go with you."

"Next week a questing we will go;
I'll break the news to those below,"

chortled Scraps with a gay bounce.

"Well, don't break all the furniture while you're about it," warned Dorothy, as the Patchwork Girl vaulted easily over the sofa and fell through the door.

"Oh, I do hope my blue dress will be finished in time," exclaimed Trot, clasping her hands eagerly.

"Can I take Hank?" inquired Bettsy Bobbin, who was extremely fond of the little mule she had brought from America. At this, Sir Hokus looked thoughtfully at his boots.

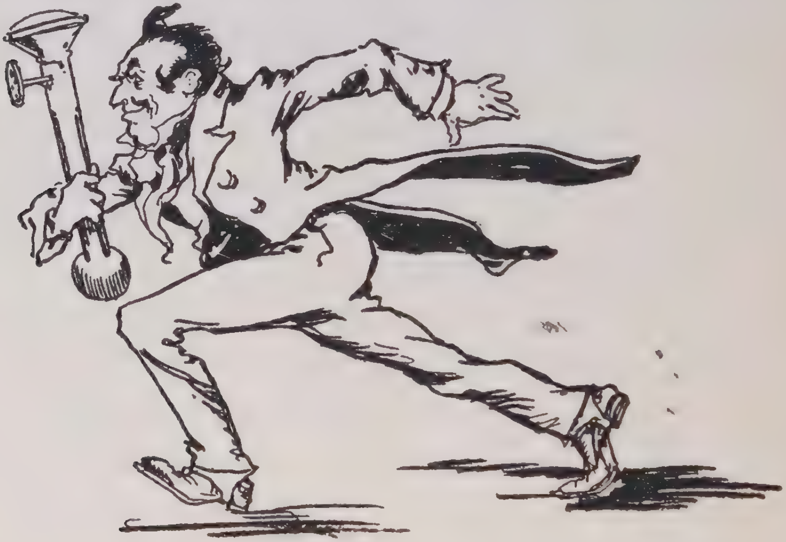
In my day,” mused the Knight mournfully, “maidens remained quietly at home, doing household tasks, embroidering, watching from towers, and so on——”

“How stuffy!” sniffed Bettsy Bobbin, sliding carefully into his lap, which his armor made rather hard and uncomfortable. “How old-fashioned. Now don’t be quaint! What fun is it watching from a tower? And this embroidery and so on that you talk about ruins the eyes, and you know it!”

“Well, well,” rumbled Sir Hokus, looking uneasily into Bettsy’s bright eyes, “I see no signs of ruin here, but let us speak of this to-morrow,” and setting Bettsy gently on the floor, he bowed to all three girls and went clanking down the gold-flagged hallway muttering unhappily to himself. “Odds fish and funnels! Why did I ever mention this quest? Before morning every man, maiden, child, and kitten in the castle will know of it. Go to, now! It is too bad! Go *too*, now! Why, that’s just what they’ll all want to do. ’Twill be a parade and no quest at all. By my Knight shirt, it is too much!” Reaching his great stone chambers, Sir Hokus leaned against his four-post bed and stared gloomily at a picture of his friend the Scarecrow on the opposite wall. And his fears, let me tell you, were well founded, for news travels fast in the

Emerald City, especially good news. In less than an hour there was not a soul in that whole merrie castle who had not heard from Scraps that the Good Knight of Oz was about to fare forth upon an adventure.

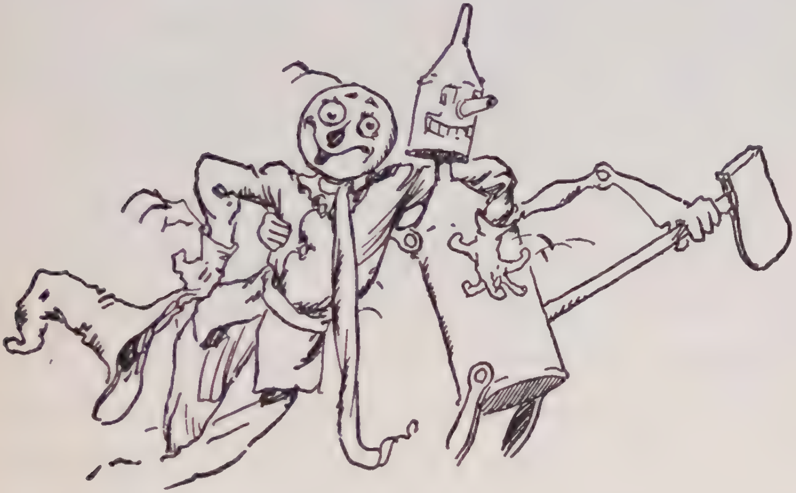
In his tower room, Tik Tok, the machine man, marched sternly to and fro, practising thrusts and parries with an old cane. The Soldier with Green Whiskers began to brush his beard vigorously and try to recall what he had done with his sword, his musket, and his military brushes. The little Wizard of Oz, in his laboratory back of the throne room, took down his bag and began rubbing his hands briskly



as he sorted out the magic appliances best suited to a perilous adventure. Even Dorothy's pink kitten stopped washing her face long enough to decide which bow she would wear upon this grand and exciting occasion.

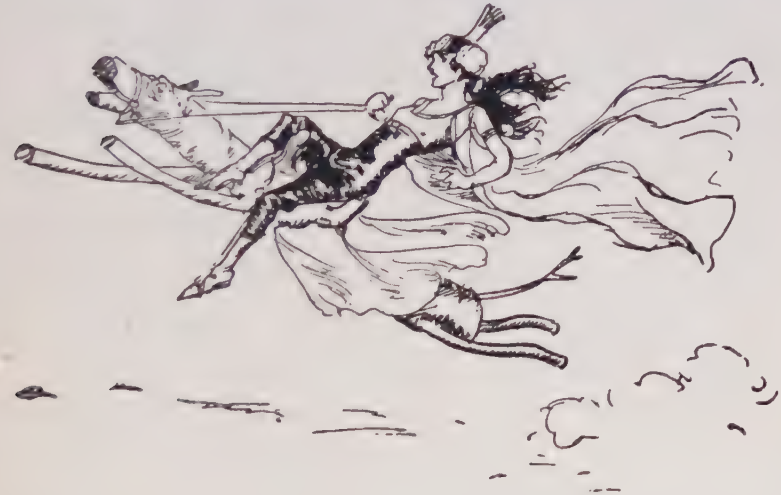
Now Oz, as nearly everyone knows, is the happiest Kingdom out of the world, a Kingdom so unfashionable, informal and jolly, that Queen Ozma thinks nothing of jumping rope, and even the most important court officials play tag and croquet in the gardens after tea. Perhaps this is because the Ruler of Oz is a girl, a fairy, to be sure, but such an unassuming, gracious fairy that no one feels frightened or embarrassed by her power or importance. Yet, Ozma of Oz is both powerful and important. Important enough to govern the four great countries of her realm wisely and well, powerful enough to overcome all her enemies and keep her people contented and happy. Of all the fairy cities in enchanted countries anywhere, there is none to compare with Ozma's capital. Its streets sparkle and twinkle with emeralds; the towered green castle, set in a lovely flowering park, shines and glows with the same precious gems, casting a radiance that can be seen for miles on all sides. And to her castle Ozma has called the most celebrated and interesting of her subjects. In a magical country like Oz, where wizards, witches, and fabulous monsters still abound, there are certain to be unusual and amazing characters. But Ozma is fondest of Dorothy, Bettsy and Trot, three young girls from the United States, who reached the Emerald City at different times after bewildering adventures in her fairy Kingdom. All three found life there so exciting and gay that they have never returned to America at all, and living in the palace with the Queen they advise her in all important matters of state, and accompany her on all of her visits and adventures.

Dorothy, having come first, has had more strange experiences than almost anyone else, and has discovered a great many of the Oz celebrities. On her first trip she found the Scarecrow, a delightful straw-stuffed person who spends half of his time in the capital and the other half in a splendid corn-ear castle near the Royal Residence of his friend the Tin Woodman. Nick is a woodman entirely of tin, another of Dorothy's discoveries, and so kind and dependable that Ozma has made him Emperor of the East and Ruler of the Winkies. Nick's only worry is that his joints will rust, and no one thinks it odd that he carries an oil can wherever he goes and often stops in the middle of a conversation to lubricate his jaws. Tik Tok, on the other hand, is made of copper and was manufactured by a firm of magicians to be a slave to the King of Ev. The machine man is guaranteed to last a thousand years and can walk, talk, think and do everything but live. Dorothy found Tik Tok locked in a



cave, and releasing the copper man, brought him to the Emerald City, where he is greatly admired and respected. Like Tik Tok, the Patchwork Girl is of magic origin, too, having been intended for a servant by her owner. Made from an old patchwork quilt, stuffed with cotton by a wizard's wife, Scraps was brought to life by the wizard's Powder of Life. But so much cleverness and fun got into Scraps' make-up that she refused to work and, taking an unceremonious leave of her master, ran off to the capital. Wherever Scraps happens to be, there is always plenty of fun and excitement. Then, along with the interesting people in the Emerald City, there are many amazing animals, every one of them able to talk as fast as you can. There are the Cowardly Lion, the Hungry Tiger, an Iffin, a glass cat, and so many more it would never do to start telling you about them. Indeed, when I start talking about the celebrities at Ozma's court I never *do* know when to stop. To describe them all would take about three days and as you probably have not that long to listen, and know most of them as well as I do, I'll not try, but shall get back to Sir Hokus of Pokes and his quest. Not much is known of the early history of this brave Knight except that for five centuries he was imprisoned in the Kingdom of Pokes, until he was rescued by Dorothy and the Cowardly Lion not so long ago. Since then he has lived in the capital and has been of great assistance to Ozma in the wars and uprisings that disturb her peaceful Kingdom from time to time.

To some, five centuries might seem to make a man a bit ancient, but in Oz, where no one ever really grows old, it is just middle-aged, and Sir Hokus can hold his own with any of the young fellows in the castle. Hearing a great buzz and clatter beneath his windows, the Good Knight looked out and saw fifty of Ozma's gay courtiers drilling under the lime-drop trees with more than half the palace servants treading earnestly behind them. Learning from Scraps that Sir Hokus was about to start upon a quest, they, too, had decided to accompany him. In the royal stables the excitement was no less. The Sawhorse, Ozma's little wooden steed, magically brought to life, was quite certain he would be chosen for the Knight's charger.



"Who," whinnied the Sawhorse proudly, "can travel so fast or so far as I, without food, rest, or water?" The Cowardly Lion and the Hungry Tiger exchanged knowing glances, for they felt that Sir Hokus would much prefer a soft seat upon their backs. Hank, Bettsy's mule, explained to everyone in a loud bray that if Bettsy Bobbin were going he was going, and the voices of the Comfortable Camel and the Doubtful Dromedary grew positively shrill when anyone suggested that they might be left behind.

"Hokus is our dear discoverer. He found and brought us to the Emerald City and would not think of going on a quest without us," quavered the Comfortable Camel, rolling his eyes appealingly at Hank.

"You eat too much," sniffed the little mule. "And hee, haw! Hee, haw! You wobble too much!"

"You bray too much," put in the Doubtful Dromedary, coming to the rescue of his friend. "And don't you get hee haughty with me, sir!" And so they argued back and forth, till even the family of mice in the hayloft knew Sir Hokus was going upon a quest, and the tiniest member had resolved to slip in the Knight's boot and go, too.

Nothing else was talked of at dinner that night in the palace, and so interested were Ozma, Dorothy, and the others, that they scarcely noticed that Sir

Hokus himself said never a word and ate hardly a mouthful. Indeed, right in the middle of an argument as to the advisability of taking water-proofs or just heavy coats, the Knight tiptoed off to his own apartment and flung himself wearily down on a stone bench.

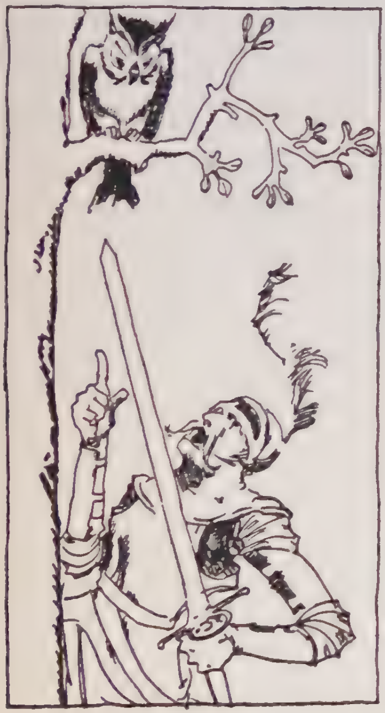
"It's not that I don't want them!" groaned Sir Hokus sadly, "but how, with an army like that, can I hope to rescue a damsel, slay a dragon, or challenge a giant to mortal combat? And how shall I know that I am still brave and fit to do battle with fabulous monsters? The Wizard's magic will overcome all our difficulties, Scraps' verses will make even the enemy laugh, and with so many maidens, how can I hope for a proper fight? I would not mind just Dorothy or Ozma, but everyone in the castle! Odds black and blue fish! It is too much!" Folding his arms, Sir Hokus glared at a large calendar on his wall, then suddenly smote his hands joyfully together. Three days before Monday, the day set by Dorothy for the quest. Three days!

"Hah!" breathed the Knight gleefully, and again, "Hah!" Snatching up his battle-axe and seizing his second best helmet from its hook behind the door, he trod softly into the hall and down a little-used stairway to the garden.

And while preparations for his quest went merrily forward, Sir Hokus himself, without even one sandwich or extra suit of armor, marched grimly through the night.

THE KNIGHT'S FIRST ADVENTURE

CHAPTER TWO



WALKING rapidly, Sir Hokus soon reached the outskirts of the Emerald City and paused on the edge of a small wood to consider the next step of his journey. In which of the four countries of Oz would he be most likely to find a maiden in distress, a monarch in need of his trusty sword, or a monster ferocious enough to engage in mortal combat?

Should he go to the North,

into the purple land of the Gillikins and offer his services to Joe King, and Queen Hyacinth? Or into the red Quadling Country where Glinda, the Good Sorceress, ruled over the turbulent tribes of the South? To the West stretched the blue realm of the Munchkins with its wonderful Sapphire City and newly appointed sovereign, Cheeriobed the First. Should he go there? To the East lay the yellow domain of the Winkies ruled over by the Tin Woodman, and after looking thoughtfully in each direction, Sir Hokus turned his steps toward the East. It was in the Winkie Country that he had been first discovered by little Dorothy and in this strange and enchanted Empire he hoped to learn something of his former history.

During his five century imprisonment in Pokes, Sir Hokus had lost all recollection of his early life and since his residence in the Emerald City he had been too occupied and interested to bother. But now, treading through the starlit wood, he began to think of the long ago days of his youth, to wonder whence he had come, who he really was and what great purpose had sent him riding upon that first quest on a faraway and but dimly remembered morning. Of his father or his father's castle he could recall nothing. He only remembered meeting, not far from the postern gates, a strange, black Knight who had harshly challenged him to battle. Sir Hokus had accepted the challenge at once and unseated the stranger with a clever thrust of his lance.

Instantly the black Knight had sprung up, and crying in a loud voice, "Live, wretch, for centuries in the stupidest Kingdom in Oz," had disappeared, and Sir Hokus himself, though of course that was not his name at that time, had been immediately transported to Pokes and there he had been held captive for long forgotten ages until Dorothy and the Cowardly Lion had come there by chance and all three had managed to escape together.

"Strange," mused the Knight, shaking his head sorrowfully, "strange that I can remember nothing more of it." The longer he thought, the less he could think of, and finally he gave it up altogether. "After all, does it matter?" he murmured, throwing back his shoulders and standing a trifle more straight. "A Knight's but a Knight and can but be bold!" Cheered by the thought of his own boldness, he peered about hopefully for signs of a dragon or stray gundersnatch. "What ho!" he roared lustily, more to keep himself company than because he expected any answer. "What ho, there! What HO!"

"What who?" quavered a shrill voice from the branch of a tree just ahead, and a big, yellow owl blinked disagreeably down at him. "What who-ooo are you, and what 'Ho' is this you are calling?" he demanded sulkily.

"Ah, my good bird," Sir Hokus bowed politely, "perchance you can direct me to a maiden in distress, a monarch in need of my sharp sword, or a monster whose head I might haply dissever."

"Dissever?" screeched the owl, ruffling his feathers. "Well, did you ever! There are no maidens, monarchs, or monsters in this wood, and I advise you to go home and mind your own business."

"It is a Knight's business to render assistance to others," Sir Hokus informed him sternly.

"Oh, you're a Knight are you?" The owl opened his eyes wider. "Well, I'm a Knight, too, a night owl, and you may render me a service if you will."

"Name it!" Eagerly Sir Hokus drew his sword.

"You can go away," sniffed the owl fretfully, settling down on the branch. "Go away, go along with you!" And as Sir Hokus stood uncertain whether to clip a few feathers from its tail to teach it a lesson in courtesy or just go off, the bird closed its eyes. "Good-night, Knight," it yawned sleepily.

"Good-night, night owl," answered Sir Hokus, deciding that after all the creature was not worth a quarrel. "Odds bodikens! I might as well be home in bed for all the adventures I'm having," he sighed, moving mournfully along in the moonlight. "Not a wild beast has crossed my path, not a witch, a robber, or even one little dragon! Hah, Hoh, HUM!" With another great yawn, the Knight removed his heavy armor, hung it on a nearby branch, and wrapping himself in his gray cloak lay down under a tree and slept soundly till morning. The chatter of the yellow birds awakened him about six, and buckling on his armor he quenched his thirst in a clear forest brook. As there were no breakfast bushes or afternoon tea trees about he marched resolutely onward. The forest grew denser at every step and he was often forced to hew out a path with his battle-axe, but about noon he came to a narrow footway shut in on both sides by giant trees and heavy underbrush. Following this for several miles, Sir Hokus was suddenly cheered by a bright shaft of sunlight ahead. Hurrying forward joyfully, he was about to step out into the open when a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder.

"Halt!" cried a deep voice. "Halt! Stop! And other words meaning surrender!"

"Surrender?" bellowed the Knight, with a furious bounce. "Stand back, knave! Unhand me, villain! Who dares cry 'halt' to Sir Hokus of Pokes?"

"Getsom and Gotsom!" answered the same deep voice. "Getsom and Gotsum! Mud Guards to her Majesty, Queen Marcia of Marshland."

"Mud Guards!" sputtered Sir Hokus, staring at the two without enthusiasm. "Well, in faith an' ye look it!" For Getsom and Gotsum were so spattered with mud and streaked with mire that scarcely any of their dark skin was visible. They wore rough swamp grass skirts and little else, and their long hair was tangled and matted and hung half over their sullen faces. As Sir Hokus continued to stare, the second Mud Guard addressed him:

"Good-morrow!" he croaked, jerking his forelock. Then turning to his companion he whispered hoarsely, "Be careful how you treat him, Getsom, old fellow. Remember he is the King!"

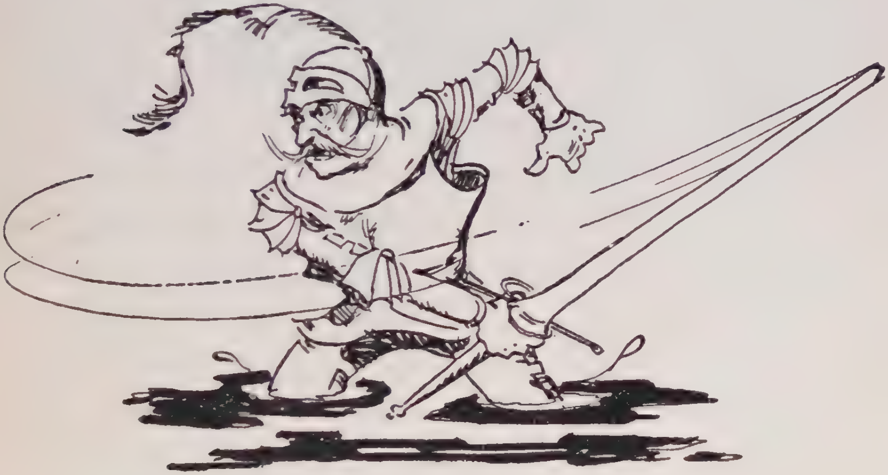
"King!" exploded Sir Hokus, growing quite curious. "What merry nonsense is this? I am a Knight, bound upon a curious quest."

"He'll do very well indeed, if we remove the shell," continued Gotsom, eyeing Sir Hokus with frank approval. "How would you like to be Monarch of the

Marshes and King of the Stick-in-the-Muds?" he asked coaxingly. "Our Queen has sworn to marry the first stranger who enters the Kingdom; you are the first, so—"

"Hold, fellow!" Imperiously Sir Hokus raised his arm. "I would hear more of this Queen."

"Well," admitted Getsom, looking uneasily at Gotsum, "she has one wonderful eye."

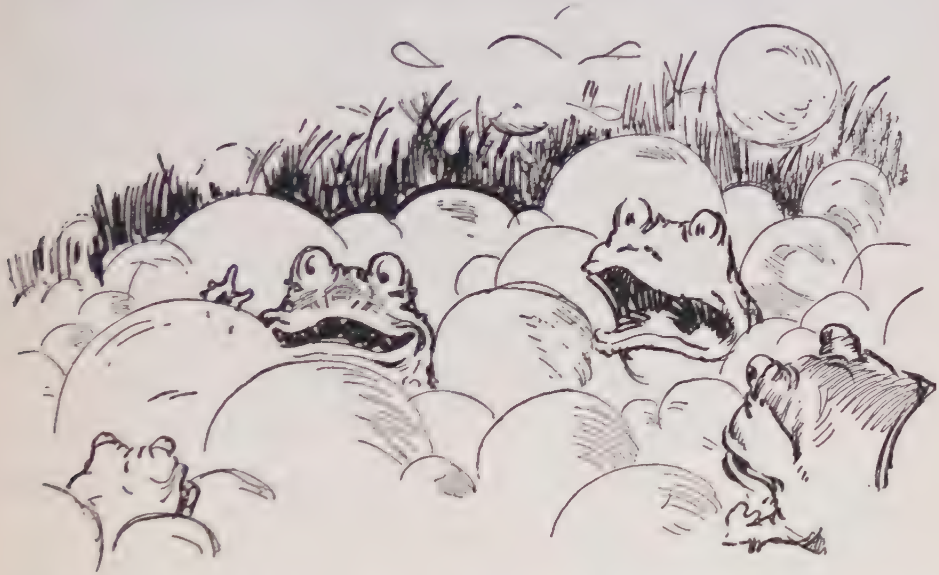


"One wonderful eye!" gulped the Knight. "By my father's beard, it is not enough! If I ever marry 'twill be a Princess with two wonderful eyes and curly hair like little Dorothy's. But I am not minded to marry at all. I crave adventure, conquest, and furious battle!"

"Marry Marcia, and you will have all three," promised Gotsom quickly.

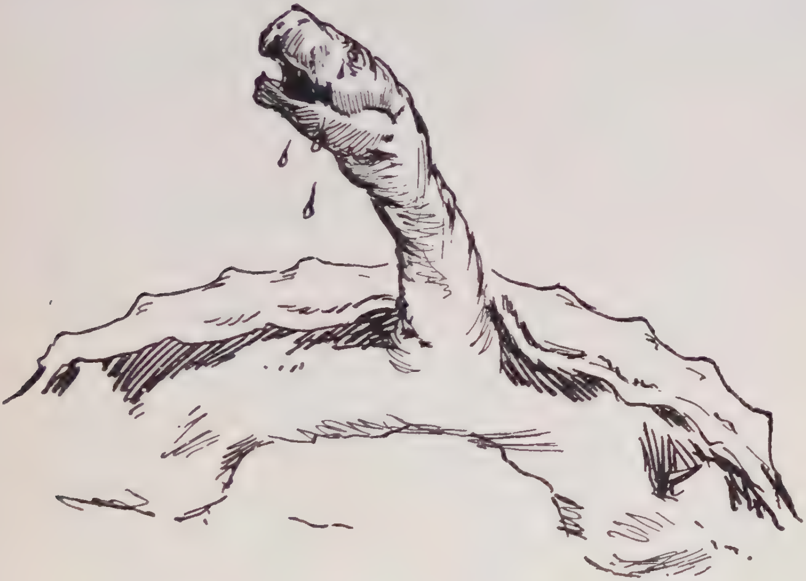
"Oh, come on! You're wasting our time," grumbled Getsom, and pressing forward impatiently the two Mud Guards made ready to seize the Knight. But Sir Hokus had no intention of being taken. Striking two ways at once, he felled Getsom with his sword and Gotsom with his battle-axe and, leaping over their inert bodies, rushed impetuously forward. Almost instantly he regretted this hasty action; for though he was indeed out of the gloomy forest, in all directions stretched a wild and desolate marsh, and scarcely had he run three paces before he began to sink down into the treacherous, watery bog. Sir Hokus struck out bravely enough, but what good is bravery in the mud? No matter how brave you are, you still keep on sinking, and weighed down by his heavy armor the Knight was soon in to his waist and going deeper every minute. Indeed, if he had not snatched desperately at a scraggly little tree, he would have disappeared altogether.

"Methinks," groaned the Knight regretfully, "methinks I had done better to have gone with those muddy rogues and taken my chance with their one-eyed Queen. They, no doubt, have a way of crossing this mire." But the Mud Guards would not regain their senses for hours, and meanwhile he could do nothing but cling to the tree. "What now? And what next?" he muttered, looking around despondently. Then he took a firmer hold on his sword. "Odds goblins!" breathed Sir Hokus, wrinkling his brows.



All around him giant bubbles were rising in the mud, and from each bubble came a great green frog's head. Odd goblins they were, indeed! Frog goblins, to be perfectly correct, and with hair-raising croaks and screeches they pressed closer, trying to pull the Knight down into the mire. Each frog goblin was about the size of a small child, and at first Sir Hokus struck them lightly with the flat of his sword. But as they came nearer and nearer, snatching with their long, skinny fingers and trying to loosen his hold on the tree, he swung his sword with all his might and brought it down with resounding whacks on their heads. But as fast as he struck down four, a dozen others hurled themselves upon him. Having only one hand free and being waist deep in the mud, Sir Hokus fought them off as best he could, but there were so many it seemed but a question of time before he would be pulled ingloriously into the swamp and suffocated. Then, suddenly, right at the height of the conflict, the frog goblins, with a hundred dismal croaks, dove into the bog. Panting with exhaustion, Sir Hokus glared around to discover the cause of their disappearance and saw a giant mud turtle plowing determinedly toward him. Its jaws snapped, its eyes rolled, and it was as large as an elephant flattened out.

"A monster!" puffed Sir Hokus. "At last, a monster! But I could wish it had come at some happier moment, when I had more breath and better footing!" Nevertheless, he pulled himself resolutely up out of the mud and, raising his sword, calmly waited for the turtle to approach. When it had almost reached his tree, the creature stopped, stretched up its neck and regarded him long and searchingly, as if it were deciding upon the best place to begin biting him. Sir Hokus endured this inspection for several minutes in silence; then, as the monster made no move or murmur, he called out impatiently:



"Quail, wretch! Quiver, or at least do something to show that you are afraid!"

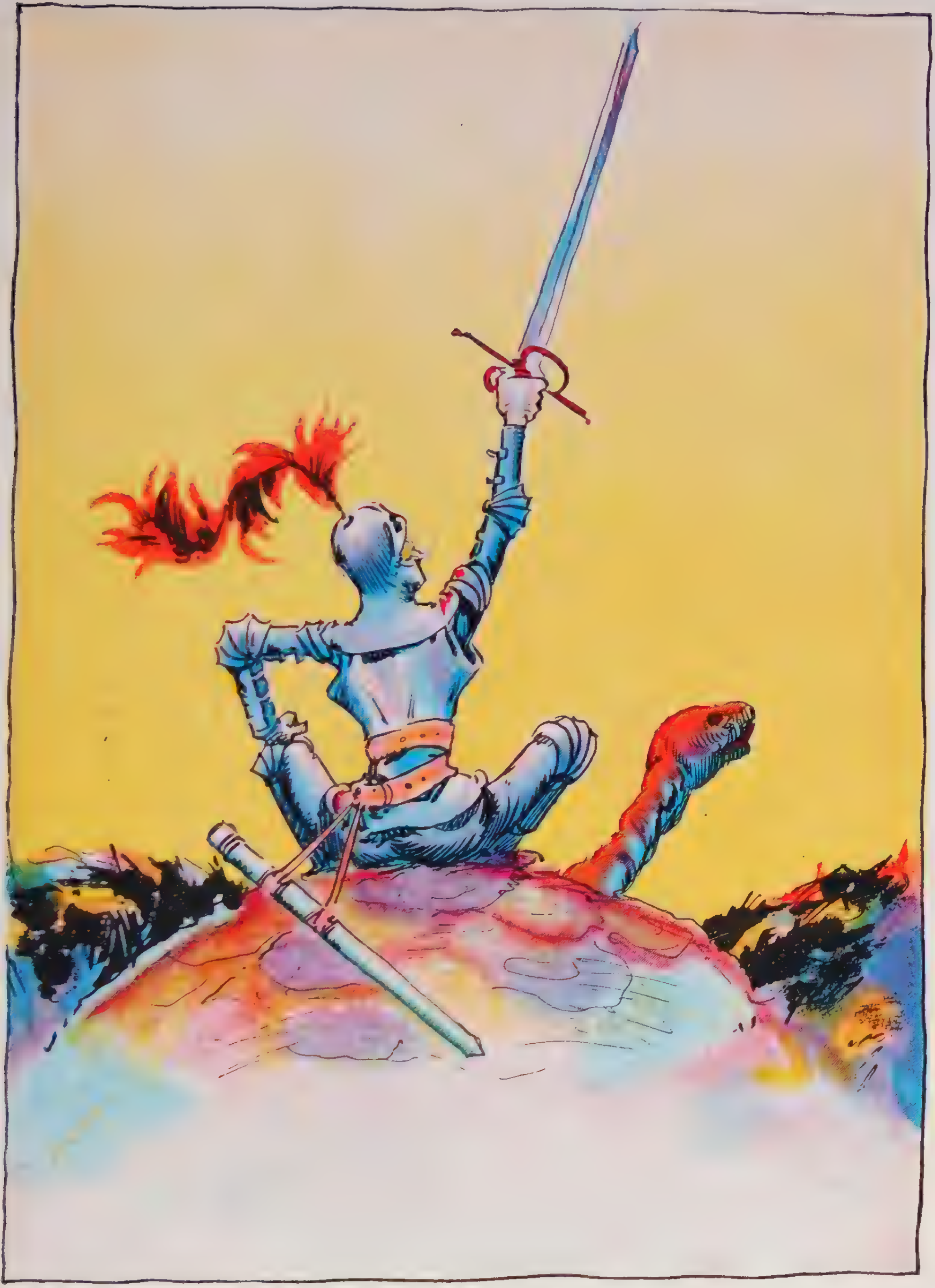
"I am not a quail," answered the turtle in a dignified voice, "and in this shell, how could I quiver?"

"Well, do what you're going to do, then," shouted the Knight, "and be done with it." Lack of breakfast and the discomforts of the past few hours had not improved his temper. "Do something, d'ye hear?"

"I am," said the turtle, blinking its eyes solemnly. "I am admiring you, dear brother. I have always suspected that somewhere a turtle man existed and here, at last, you are! What a gorgeous shell, and how perfectly it fits!" At these words, and seeing there was to be no slaying, Sir Hokus returned his sword to its scabbard and looked thoughtfully at the green monster.

"Dear, dear," it continued, rolling its eyes affectionately, "I dote on you already. Can I catch you some nice little frogs, or would you prefer a serpent for breakfast?"

"Neither," shuddered the Knight, "but you may carry me on your back, an' you will." If the creature were really as friendly as it appeared to be, he could stand being called its brother, at least until he was out of the swamp. At his words the turtle gave a squeal of pleasure, and hurling itself hit or miss through the mud, drew up like a ferryboat beside him. Seizing hold of its strong shell, Sir Hokus pulled himself thankfully up on its back.

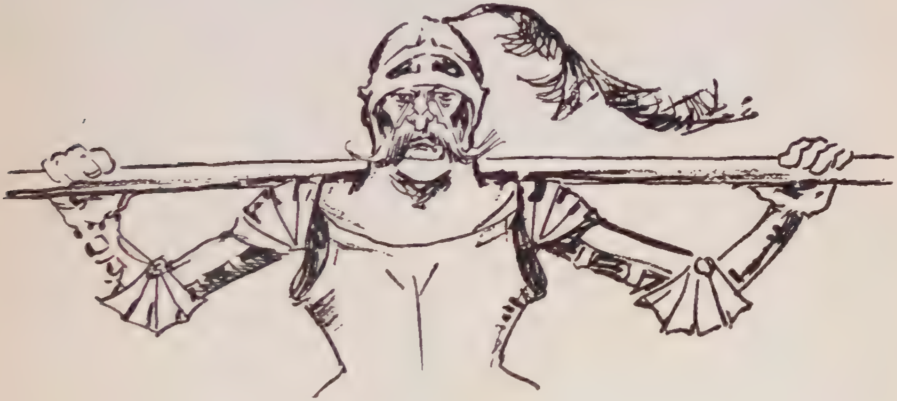


"PROCEED, PLOPPA!"—*Chapter 2*

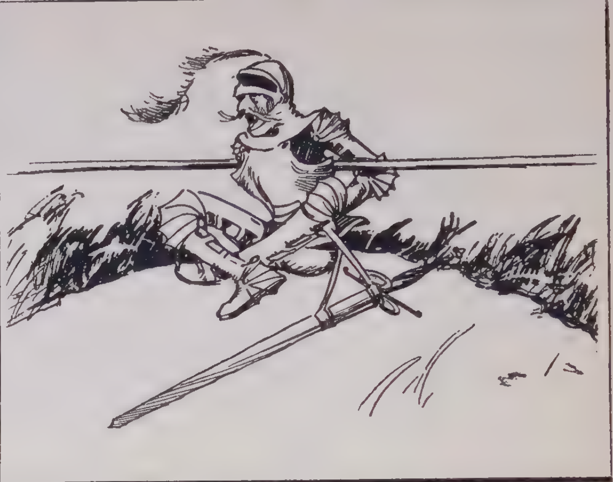
"A fine Knight Errant I must appear," he sighed, regarding his muddy armor ruefully. "No wonder it thinks I'm a turtle man! What ho, my good creature," he called anxiously, "is it far to the edge of this marsh?"

"Far—far—very far, but not too far for Ploppa," wheezed the mud turtle, looking fondly back at the Knight.

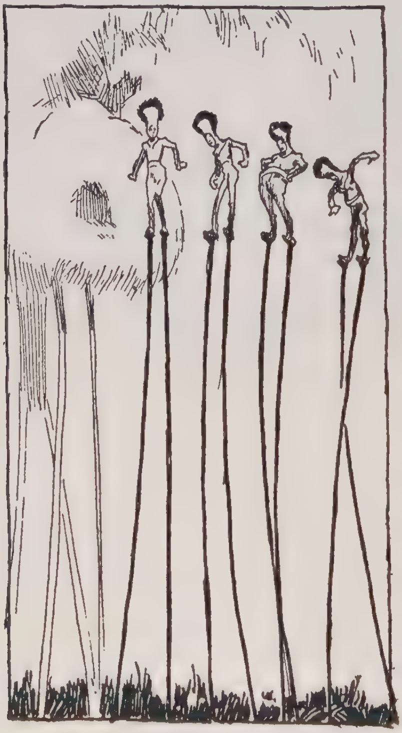
"Then proceed, Ploppa!" cried Sir Hokus, chuckling in spite of himself at the turtle's name. "Proceed, and let us make what speed we may!"



QUEEN MARCIA OF MARSHLAND



CHAPTER THREE



WITH his sword, Sir Hokus scraped some of the mud from his armor; then, settling himself cross-legged on Ploppa's back, he looked about with deep distaste.

"Are you sure you would not like to squirm along beside me?" inquired the turtle, looking fondly over his shoulder. "The marsh is beautiful to-day. Ah, to feel the delicious squg and glug of it," he murmured, rolling his eyes rapturously.

"Nay, an' I care not for this glugging," shuddered the Knight, "so splash along by yourself, dear creature." Taking some chessmen from his boot, Sir Hokus set them out on the nicely marked squares of Ploppa's shell and in the problems of the game tried to forget his hunger and the strangeness of his situation. Several times Ploppa opened his mouth to speak, for he felt extremely curious about this superior being he was carrying, but the Knight seemed so engrossed moving the ivory figures from place to place that he did not like to interrupt and churned quietly along saying nothing. Now and then a frog goblin rose from the mud, or a flock of wild geese flew screaming overhead, but for nearly an hour they met no one. Then, glancing up suddenly, Sir Hokus saw two giants striding across the marsh.

"What ho, and who goes there?" cried the Knight, thumping Ploppa on the head with a red king.

"Oh, just a couple of Stick-in-the-Muds," answered the turtle indifferently. "The marsh is full of them." Sweeping the chessmen back into his boot, Sir Hokus sat up very straight to have a better look at Queen Marcia's odd subjects. Their bodies seemed no larger than his own, but their legs were long and stick-like and reached almost to the tops of the trees.

"Why, they *are* sticks," decided Sir Hokus, after a long, intent look at the Marshlanders.

"Stilts," corrected the turtle composedly. "They use stilts to keep out of the mud, you know."

"So that's how one manages," said Sir Hokus, tapping his nose thoughtfully. He had once tried a smaller pair of stilts back in the Emerald City and had fallen hard upon his helmet, and he could not help but admire the clever way in which these fellows got about on the unwieldy poles. Their dwellings were surprising, too, for the Marshlanders lived in tiny mud-thatched houses built high up in the trees. As Sir Hokus continued to watch, the two travellers, reaching their own house, which was on an exact level with their feet, stepped off their stilts and leaving them standing against the tree went in and slammed the door. "Well done, by my head!" breathed Sir Hokus, settling back with a little chuckle. "I must tell Dorothy about this. Hast ever heard of Princess Dorothy, my good Ploppa?"

"Is she a turtle?" inquired the monster in a bored voice.

"Oh, no, no, no!" exclaimed Sir Hokus with a little gesture of distress, and immediately began telling the turtle all about the Emerald City; about Ozma, Dorothy, Bettsy, and Trot, and the other wonderful citizens of Oz.

The turtle listened attentively, and as Sir Hokus paused for breath, turned his head.

"If everything is so squg," (and "squg," I must tell you, is turtle-talk for cozy) "why did you ever come away from there?" he inquired, reasonably enough.

"Well," muttered Sir Hokus, beginning to wonder a little himself, "well!" Then recalling the high purpose of his journey, he braced up and spoke most earnestly. "A Knight," stated Sir Hokus, raising his sword solemnly, "must beware of squgness! A Knight must seek danger and go upon curious quests in search of adventure. In other words, he must fight!"

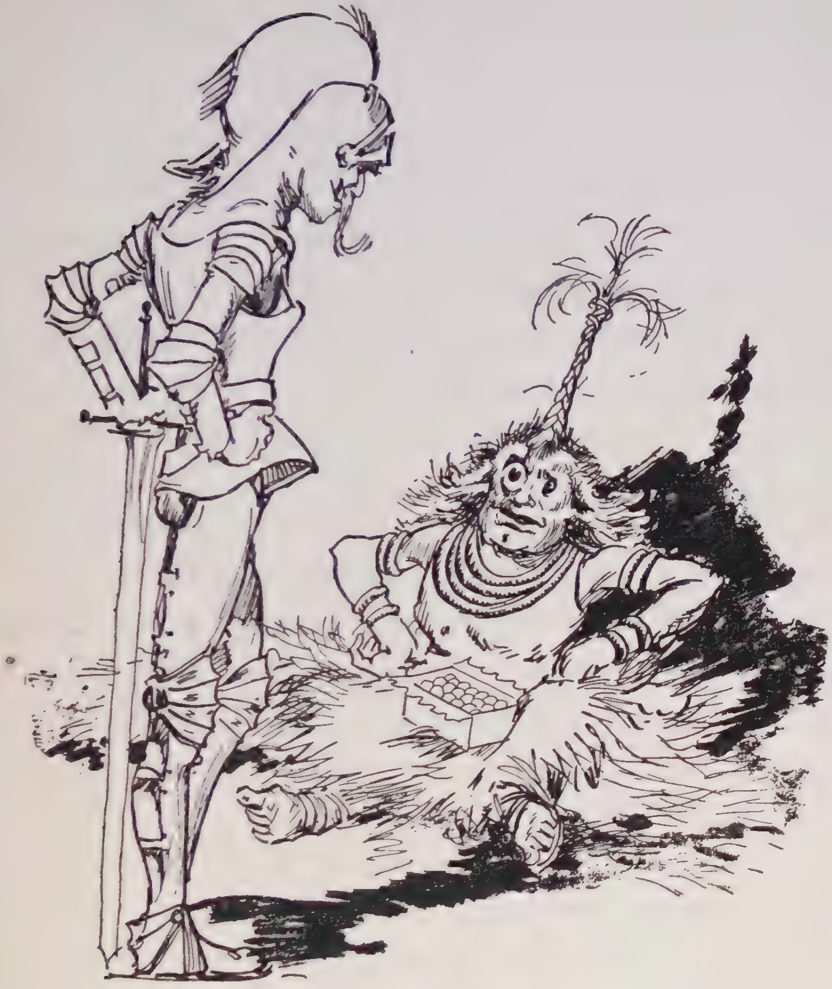
"I see," Ploppa shook his head knowingly. "By the way, have you met our Queen?"

"No, but I've heard of her," admitted Sir Hokus, recalling his strange encounter with Getsom and Gotsom. He had been so busy describing the Emerald City to Ploppa that he had not remarked the change in their surroundings. Ahead, like an oasis in a desert, lay a higher and dryer bit of ground. In the exact center of this clearing rose a mud house much larger and more pretentious than the tree dwellings of the other Stick-in-the-Muds. Before the door stood six Mud Guards, their stilts held stiffly before them. At sight of Sir Hokus, all six dropped their stilts and stared at him so fixedly that his grip upon his sword tightened and he quietly reached for his battle-axe.

"The Royal Hut of her Majesty, Queen Marcia," announced the turtle, seeming to take no notice of the Guards.

"Yes? Yes, but let us make haste!" puffed Sir Hokus, thumping Ploppa hard upon the shell. "I crave not to meet her muddy Majesty." But before Ploppa could obey his instructions, they had come opposite the hut; the six Guards darted forward, and jumping upon Ploppa's back, dragged Sir Hokus triumphantly in to the Queen.

"The King!" they shouted, all together. "Long live the King!" And hurling the Knight upon the floor of the hut, they stood proudly at attention. Queen Marcia sat cross-legged on the floor, eating marshmallows from a large box at her side. She looked, at first glance, like a South Sea Islander, with her dark skin and skirt of swamp grass. But when Sir Hokus, who had instantly sprung to his feet, gazed into the face of this royal lady, he was too stunned to speak or even



Queen Marcia sat cross-legged on the floor stutter. Marcia had, indeed, one wonderful eye. It was large, brown, and lively, turning in toward the nose. The other, which was small and blue and turned impishly outward, did not count at all. The Queen's hair had evidently never been combed, and Sir Hokus in his whole seven centuries had not seen anyone so bewilderingly wild and ugly. As he stood uncomfortably shifting from one foot to the other, Marcia's dog, a dingy little swampoodle, rushed out and snapped viciously at his heels. But the Knight's armor served him well, and yelping with pain and bad temper the swampoodle ran back to its mistress. The Queen had been examining Sir Hokus quite as closely as he had been examining her, and now, popping another marshmallow into her mouth, she spoke.

"Well, I'll be splattered!" mumbled her Majesty. "I'll be splashed and splattered! What do *you* think of him, Mira? My sister, the Marchioness of Muckengoo!" explained the Queen, with a wave at the dark-skinned lady at her side. Sir Hokus bowed in a dazed fashion and Mira, who was weaving baskets from dried reeds, squinted critically up at the Knight.

"Well," said Mira, after a long, earnest squint, "if you don't marry him, sister, I shall!"

"But ladies!" protested Sir Hokus, backing away in great distress, "this is impossible! I must go——"

"Silence!" roared Marcia, as well as she could with her mouth full of marshmallows. "I have sworn to marry the first stranger who enters my Kingdom, and marry you I will. Guards! Fetch the crown, bring on the food, and summon the guests!"

"You always have the best of everything," pouted Mira, throwing down her reeds. "You married the last stranger. This one is mine!" Swallowing with great difficulty, the Marchioness of Muckengoo buried her face in her handkerchief and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"But if your Majesty is already married," began Sir Hokus, stepping forward hopefully, "how can you marry me?"

"Silence!" cried the Queen furiously. "Speak when you're spoken to, and bow when you speak to me."

"The last King was a p—peer!" sobbed Marcia, coming out from behind her handkerchief.

"Well, what became of him?" demanded the Knight, paying no attention to Marcia's angry gestures.

"He—he disappeared!" confided the Marchioness, beginning to sob anew.

"Oh, I expect he fell off his stilts and was lost in the mud," sniffed the Queen unfeelingly. "You must be careful with your stilts, fellow. By the way, what is your name?"

"You see in me a Knight, bound upon a curious quest," announced Sir Hokus, resolved to speak his mind and end this ridiculous discussion. "You see——"

"That will do, Usee! Smirch! Conduct the King to his apartment and see that he is served a portion of the royal duck." At the Queen's last remark, Sir Hokus brightened visibly, for he had not eaten since the night before.

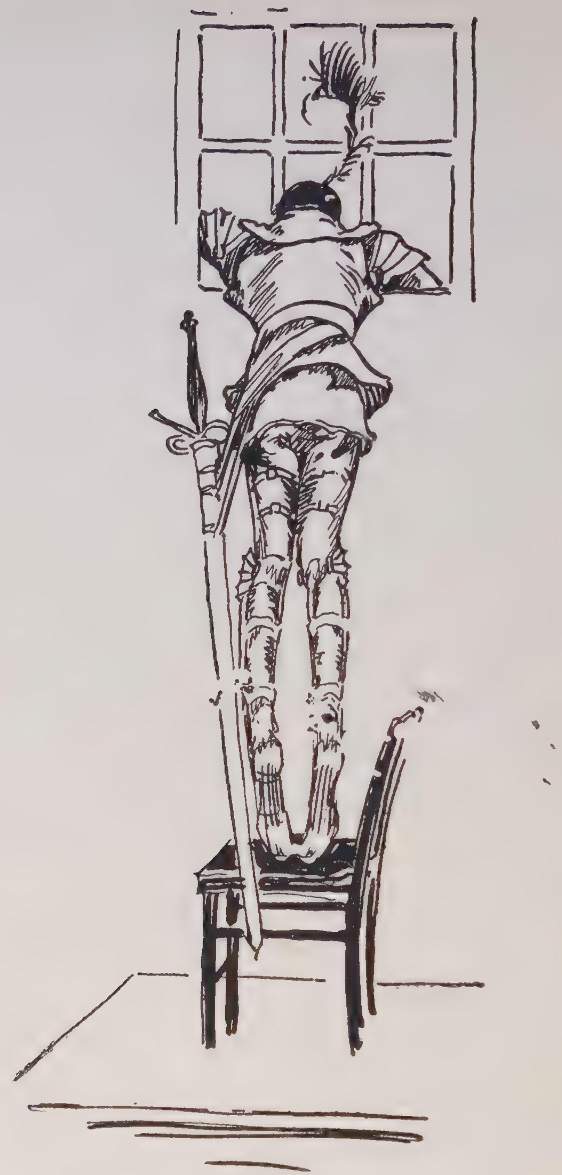
"Duck!" muttered Sir Hokus. "Well, beshrew me now, after a portion of the royal duck I'll be better able to duck this whole proceeding." A glance at the door had convinced him that escape, for the time being, was impossible. Ten Mud Guards had replaced the first six and at a slight move in their direction all ten had brandished their stilts threateningly. So, resolved to fall in with the plans of the Queen for the moment and make off at the first opportunity, Sir Hokus followed Smirch into a small, mean room at the back of the royal hut. There was a rough table and chair, and a pile of grass in the corner evidently served for a bed. While the Knight was reflecting upon the very doubtful pleasures of being King of the Marsh, Smirch brought in a heaping platter of duck and, retreating, locked the door securely behind him. Almost never had anything tasted so delicious and Sir Hokus, unmindful of his dreary surroundings and his approaching marriage, fell upon the platter and soon reduced the duck to skin and bones. Then, much refreshed, he rose up to see what was to be done. The room's one window was high and barred, but by placing a chair upon the table and standing on that, he could manage to see out. What he saw filled him with new hope and courage. Asleep in the tall grass beneath the window lay the giant mud turtle.

"Good, honest, faithful creature!" puffed the Knight, looking around for something to throw at Ploppa. There was nothing in the room but the knife, fork, and platter. The first two made no impression, but as the platter splintered to bits on his shell, Ploppa raised his head.

"What ho! What ho, below!" whispered the Knight, so as not to arouse the Guards.

"Oh, it's you, is it? Well, how are you enjoying the fighting? Is our Queen not a famous fighter?" wheezed Ploppa, blinking his eyes in an interested fashion.

"It is not seemly for a knight to fight with ladies," hissed Sir Hokus earnestly. "And lest I forget I am a



"BREAK ME THESE BARS"

Knight, I must get hence. Get me hence at once, my good Ploppa. Wouldst have me marry a wild-eyed witch and break my head learning to stilt?"

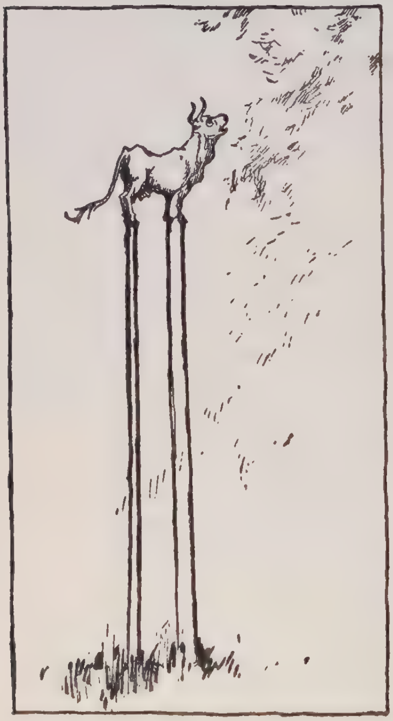
"But they will follow us," panted the turtle, pulling himself erect. So huge was the turtle that it towered above the house top and had to bend down to look in the window. "The Queen will not let you go."

"Break me these bars," breathed Sir Hokus impatiently. "Break me these bars and we'll go anyway. And if we are followed, I'll break a few heads. Odds dragons! A few heads, and shins, and what nots!" As easily as you or I would bend wax, Ploppa forced the window bars apart with his strong claws; then, peering round to be sure nobody was looking, he put his face close to the Knight's.

"I have just thought of something," confided the turtle hoarsely. "When I return and call three times, be ready to jump!" Before Sir Hokus could stop him or ask about his plan, the great mud turtle was flopping at a great pace across the marsh.

PLOPPA AND SIR HOKUS ESCAPE

CHAPTER FOUR



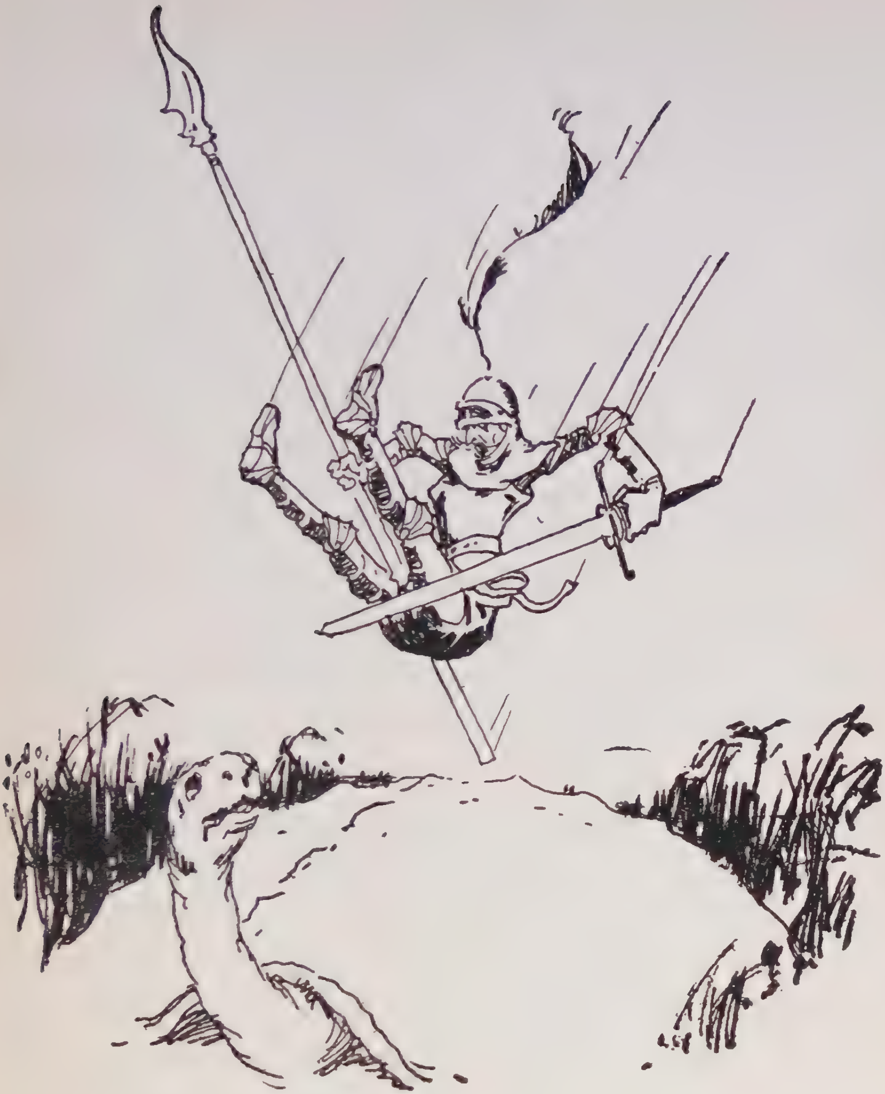
GLOOMILY Sir Hokus climbed down from the table. If he jumped before Ploppa's return, he could only reach the edge of the clearing and then sink into the treacherous mud. But suppose the turtle was too late? In great agitation he paced up and down the narrow room. Preparations for the wedding were going forward briskly, judging from the thumps and bangs and excited shrieks on the other side of the door.

"A pretty kettle of blue fish!" fumed Sir Hokus, who, like most of the rest of us, had often dreamed of his own wedding and pictured an affair of great pomp and magnificence. "Not a cake nor a castle in the whole Kingdom. Like as not there'll be mud pie. Not a tune—not a dance step. And such a bride!" Climbing on the table again, he stared anxiously out of the window. All around the Queen's hut little black pigs grunted and squealed. In the distance he saw several cows on stilts nibbling hungrily at the tree tops, but nowhere in that whole dreary waste could he catch so much as a glimpse of Ploppa. Sir Hokus tried to imagine himself King of the Marshes, wobbling about uncomfortably on stilts, pointing out the sights to Dorothy or Bettsy Bobbin, but the mere thought of Marcia for a Queen made his heart thump so hard it rattled all his armor. "As soon as that door opens, I'll make a dash for it," he decided desperately, "and woe to the man who stands in my way!" But it was not a man who stood in the door when it did open, but Marcia herself, surrounded by a bevy of marsh maidens. Her brown eye rolled round and round with excitement, and in her arms she clasped a huge bouquet of tiger lilies and cat-tails.

"Approach, Usee!" croaked this frightful apparition. "Approach and salute your Queen!"

"Avaunt, woman!" rasped Sir Hokus, backing rapidly toward the window. "Avaunt, wench, and come not near!" Though Marcia repelled him utterly, the Knight could not bring himself to push her aside and fight his way through the marsh maidens to the door. Queen Marcia had no such nice feelings to hold her back and, infuriated by the Knight's remarks, she rushed upon him and brought her bouquet down so hard upon his helmet that tiger lilies and cat-tails flew in every direction. I am not sure how long Sir Hokus would have submitted to her pummeling, or whether he would not in time have broken his Knightly vows and struck out at this marsh maiden, but at this instant three shrill calls sounded at the window. In one leap he was upon the table, in another, on the chair.

"Lady!" boomed Sir Hokus, pulling himself up on the ledge and kissing his mailed glove to the Queen of the Marshes. "Lady, farewell!" Headlong he dove through the window and, amid the screeches of the Stick-in-the-Muds, disappeared. The shock of his landing on Ploppa's hard shell rendered him speechless for several seconds, and by the time he had



"Lady, farewell!"

regained his breath and his balance, Ploppa had reached the edge of the clearing and plunged joyfully into the impenetrable swamp.

"A lucky and timely escape!" panted Sir Hokus, peering expectantly around for signs of the enemy. "How, now? Does no man pursue?"

"Trust Ploppa for that," grunted the turtle, looking back with a chuckle. "I've knocked down all the stilts for miles around and tramped them into the mire. A fine time they'll have making new ones!"

"You did?" roared the Knight, feeling more really cheerful than he had felt since he left the Emerald City. "Ho! Ho! Ho! This is capital, my dear Ploppa! Excellent and grand." Sir Hokus bent nearly double at the effort of a tree-dweller to draw his stilts out of the mud with a fishing line. And it was comical indeed to see Marcia and her court marooned on the tiny clearing surrounding her hut, making fierce gestures and shouting for the Knight to return. From every tree-house they passed, Stick-in-the-Muds screamed and scolded, but Ploppa had done his work so well that they were forced to stick to their trees and were powerless to prevent their new King from escaping.

"I could love you for this!" beamed the Knight, thumping Ploppa affectionately on the shell.

"Then you won't leave the swamp?" cried the turtle, with a little flounce of excitement. "Do say that you will remain. I'll find you a dry spot for a hut, bring you all the frogs you can eat, carry you everywhere on my back, and when you wish to fight there are always Stick-in-the-Muds handy."

"Nay! Nay!" sighed Sir Hokus, growing sober at the mere thought of such an existence. "I must go forward and never shall I rest till I have saved a maiden, served a monarch, and destroyed a monster. I must go on. On, and on, and on!" Ploppa made no answer, but two big tears trickled down his cheeks and fell with a great splash into the bog.

"You come with *me*," begged the Knight in great distress. "Come with me and see the world, dear Ploppa."

"Will there be plenty of mud?" choked the poor turtle, controlling his sobs with difficulty.

"Well, that I cannot promise," sighed the Knight, shaking his head doubtfully. "But there will be rivers and streams and plenty of fresh showers."

"But I must have mud," insisted the turtle sorrowfully, "plenty of good, thick, wet mud."

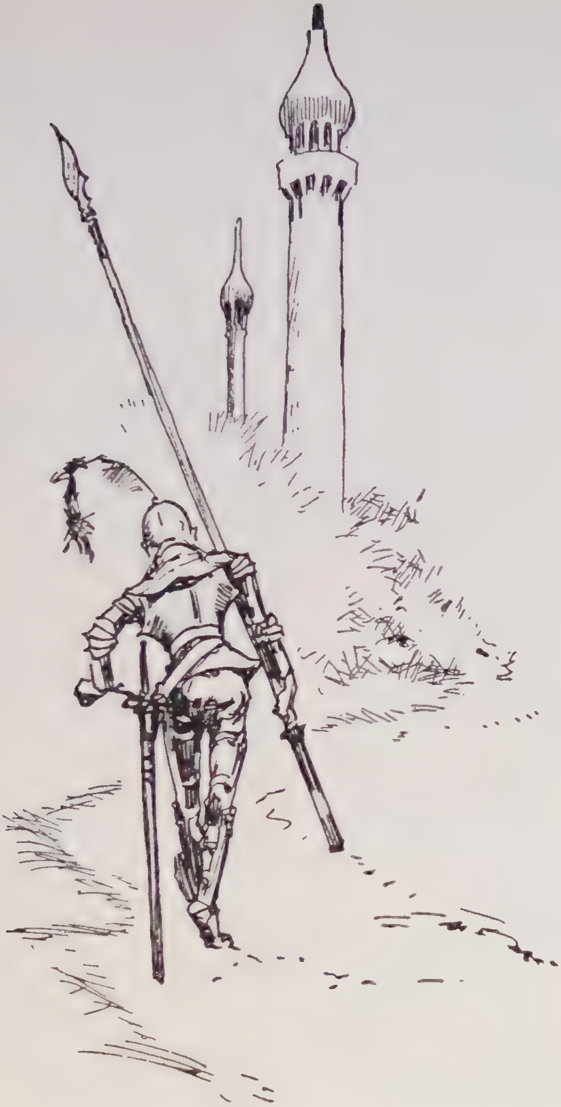
"And I must have adventure," declared Sir Hokus, looking with a shudder over the cold foggy marsh filled with the dismal croaking of frog goblins and the sigh of a desolate wind in the straggly trees. "I must have adventure and the glitter and glory of strange, glamorous places."

"I must have mud and you must have adventure. Oh, why," wailed Ploppa, with a smothered sob, "cannot people who like each other like the same things? I long to go with you, but I cannot live without mud."

"Well, I hope there is more magic and less mud in the next country I come to," said Sir Hokus, with a slight shiver. Now the next country, as it happened, was quite close, only hidden by the thick fog from the Knight's curious gaze. And presently Ploppa, dragging himself out of the swamp, set him down on the edge of a wide yellow plain.

"Good-bye!" gurgled Ploppa, winking fast to keep from crying again. "Good-bye! I'll never forget you."

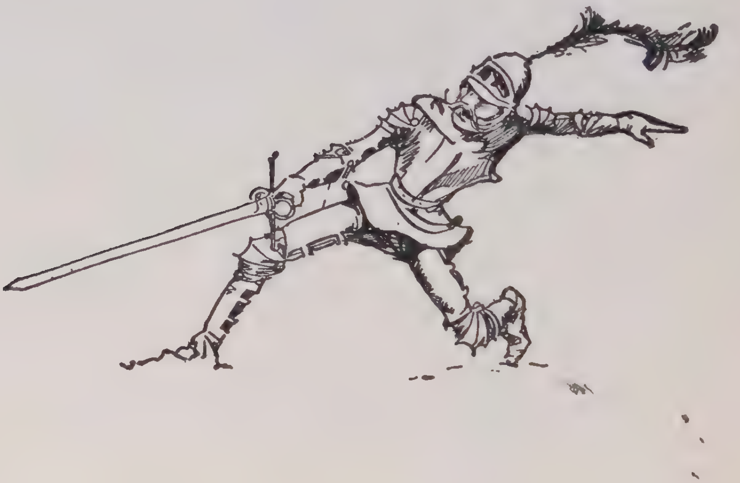
"Nor I, you, my brave fellow." Leaning down, Sir Hokus gave the slippery turtle a hug—or as much of a hug as he could manage with a monster so huge and unwieldy. "Don't grieve," he begged earnestly, "for I will return! I will return," he promised, raising his sword solemnly, "anon!" Then, because he was not feeling any too cheerful himself, he strode quickly across the plain, for in the distance he could just



HE STRODE QUICKLY ACROSS THE PLAIN

descry the gleaming turrets of a strange, tall castle.

"Anon! He will return anon!" strangled poor Ploppa, settling with a tired flop into the mud. "Anon? Anon? How long is that, pray?"



CONCERNING A CAMEL

CHAPTER FIVE

"ANY tidings, Tuzzle?" Pushing back his yellow turban, the Sultan of Samandra looked anxiously at his Grand Vizier. Without speaking, Tuzzle shook his head. "What? No tidings!" yelled the Sultan, half rising from his great cushioned throne. "Then woe is me — she, you, her, it, us, and them!" The Sultan's voice rose to a shrill scream, and sinking back on his embroidered cushions he began to rock to and fro and beat himself violently on the chest. "Woe! Woe! Woe, I tell you!"

"I am not a horse and cannot whoa, but I will do anything else that your Majesty suggests," murmured Tuzzle, folding his hands calmly on his broad stomach.

"Then summon that scoundrelly Seer and fetch the Imperial Puppy!" commanded the Sultan in a choked voice. Tuzzle inclined his head grandly, for he was a very Grand Vizier, so grand, in fact, that he never did anything himself, but clapped his hands twice and, to the small slaves who appeared, communicated the orders of the Sultan. In five shakes of a yellow fez the slaves returned, one ushering in Chinda, the Seer, the other bearing upon a satin cushion Confido, a tiny Pekinese and the Imperial Puppy of the Realm. The sight of the proud little dog seemed to calm the Sultan considerably. Holding it close to his round, moon-like face, he whispered excitedly into one of its long, silky ears. The little dog nodded understandingly from time to time but said nothing, partly because it had nothing to say and partly because it could not talk, even if it had. Though Samandra is in the wonderful Kingdom of Oz, the animals there do not have the gift of speech like animals in most other Oz countries, and unfortunately cannot converse at all. Perhaps this is why the Sultan made the little dog his sole confidant, told it all his worries, secrets of state, and plans. An excellent idea, when you come to think of it, and one many a monarch might follow with good results, for secrets one tells a dog go no further, and Confido never betrayed his Royal Master's confidences. After whispering earnestly, the Sultan set the dog on his knee and glared fiercely down at Chinda, the Prophet.

"So!" he hissed contemptuously. "You call yourself a Seer and yet for ten years you have been seeking my lost camel without success. Acting upon your misguided advice we have sent couriers here, there, and everywhere, searching for this valuable creature and still, still, he is lost to us! Never had I so comfortable a steed, so beauteous a beast. He was a very King of Camels; not one in my whole herd compares with him, and yet you, Chief Prophet and Seer of Samandra, allow him to be lost in a sand storm and never recovered at all."

"The sand storm was not my doing," observed Chinda stiffly. "I am a Seer and not a weather prophet, your Highness."

"A Seer, a *Seer!* Why, you sere and cast-off yellow leaf of a dead and blighted tree, have you nothing more to say for yourself?"

"Your Majesty seems to have covered the situation," answered Chinda, drawing his cloak about him with a dignified gesture. "Though why the loss of one wretched camel should cause you such unhappiness is a mystery to your humble servant. Have you not held undisputed sway over the great Kingdom of Samandra for seven centuries? Did you not, five hundred years ago, by a magic unrevealed to your illustrious advisors, conquer the neighboring Kingdoms of Corabia and Corumbia? Verily, the Corabians and Corumbians are no more; all their land and treasure are added to your riches; and yet, for the last ten years, you have done nothing but grieve for a miserable, moth-eaten, wobbly-kneed camel! And I," Chinda thumped himself gloomily upon the chest, "how *I* have suffered! My left eye has a permanent squint from staring through the magic telescope for signs of this tiresome creature. My right ear has become flattened out and uncurled listening to the undeserved and continuous abuse of a once kindly sovereign. I beg that your Excellency will permit me to retire and go to some far country where I may never hear the word 'camel' again. But before I go——" Chinda raised his voice defiantly, "before I go, let me say this: The camel you seek is in the Emerald City in the Royal Stable of Queen Ozma of Oz. Scarce ten minutes ago I saw him through a new lens in my magic telescope."

"Emerald City! My dear, dear fellow, why did you not say so before?" Tucking the Imperial Peke under his arm and fairly rolling down the steps of his throne, the Sultan flung both arms around Chinda and hugged him heartily. "You are a Seer among seers, a wiz among wizards," panted the little monarch joyfully. "I hereby promote you to Magician Extraordinary and Grand Bozzywoz of the Realm." While Chinda was recovering from the shock of his sudden promotion, and feeling his ribs to see that none were cracked, the Sultan spun round like a fat little top.

"Prepare for a journey at once," he commanded, waving his scepter at Tuzzle. "Order the Royal Sampan! You sail at dawn down the Winkie River to the capital of Oz. Have the Chief Camel Driver give you a golden halter to bring the good beast home, and moreover and furthermore," the Sultan's voice rose to an anxious squeak "see that he is wear-ing the same harness and saddle sacks that he wore when he left us, especially the saddle sacks!" finished his Excellency, shaking his finger under Tuzzle's nose.

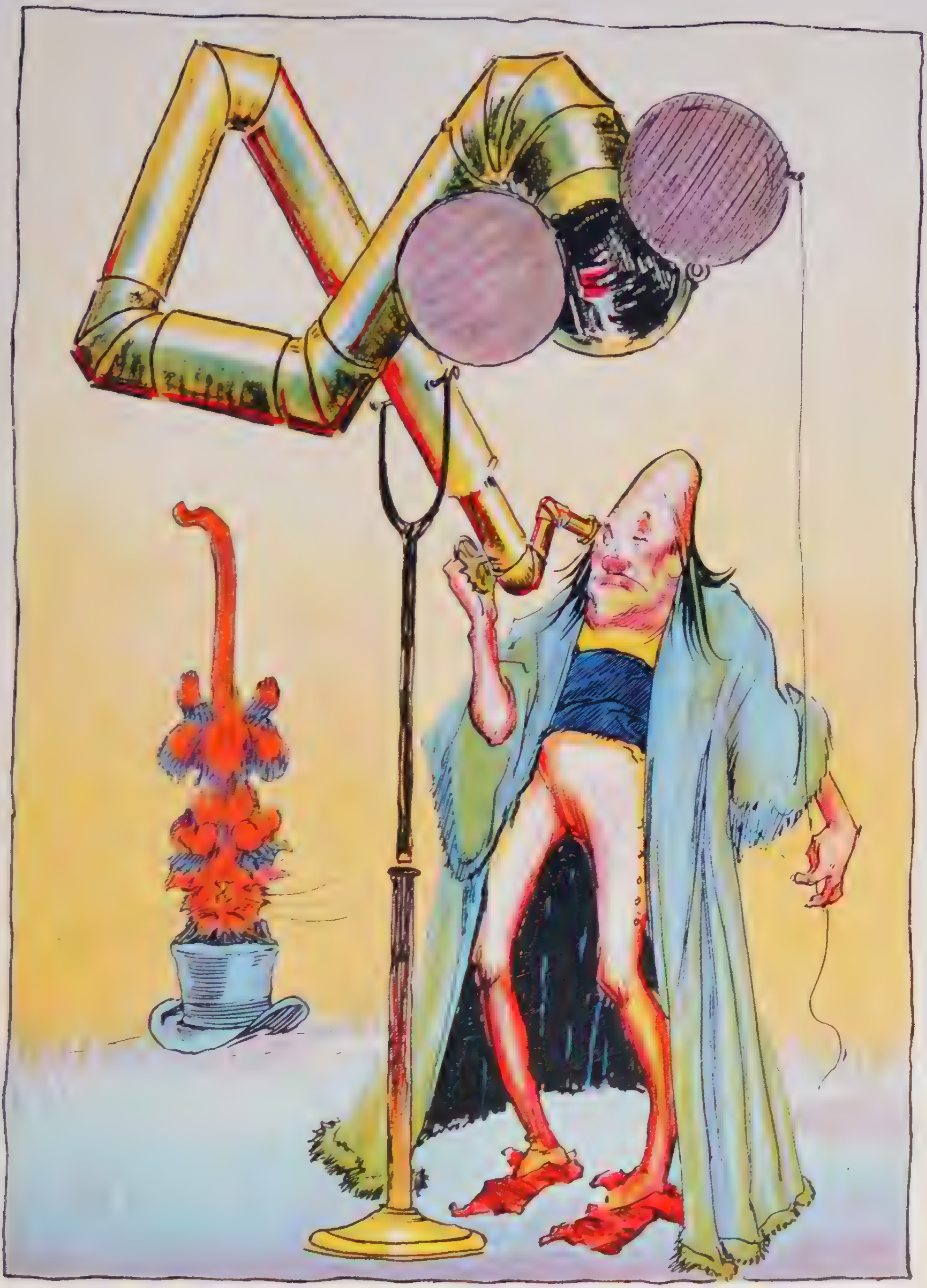
"Very well, your Highness," sighed Tuzzle resignedly, "but I will require a gold embroidered robe and twenty slaves to wait upon me that I may properly represent the Sultan of Samandra at the Court of Oz."

"Twenty fiddlesticks!" fumed the Sultan, stamping his foot. "Be ready to sail at dawn or I'll set you to work in the sulphur mines."

"That," murmured Tuzzle calmly, "would certainly undermine my constitution, so I shall be ready. But suppose this curious camel is not in the Emerald City? Suppose this is just another false vision of our precious Prophet?"

"We'll talk about that when you return," said the Sultan, panting up the steps of his throne and dropping heavily on his yellow cushions.

'And meanwhile, I'm the Grand Bozzywoz," exulted Chinda, brushing rudely past the Grand Vizier. "I'll head all the processions and take orders from no one but his Supreme Excellency! Way for the Grand Bozzywoz! Way, I tell you!"



CHINDA STARED THROUGH HIS MAGIC TELESCOPE. *Chapter 5*

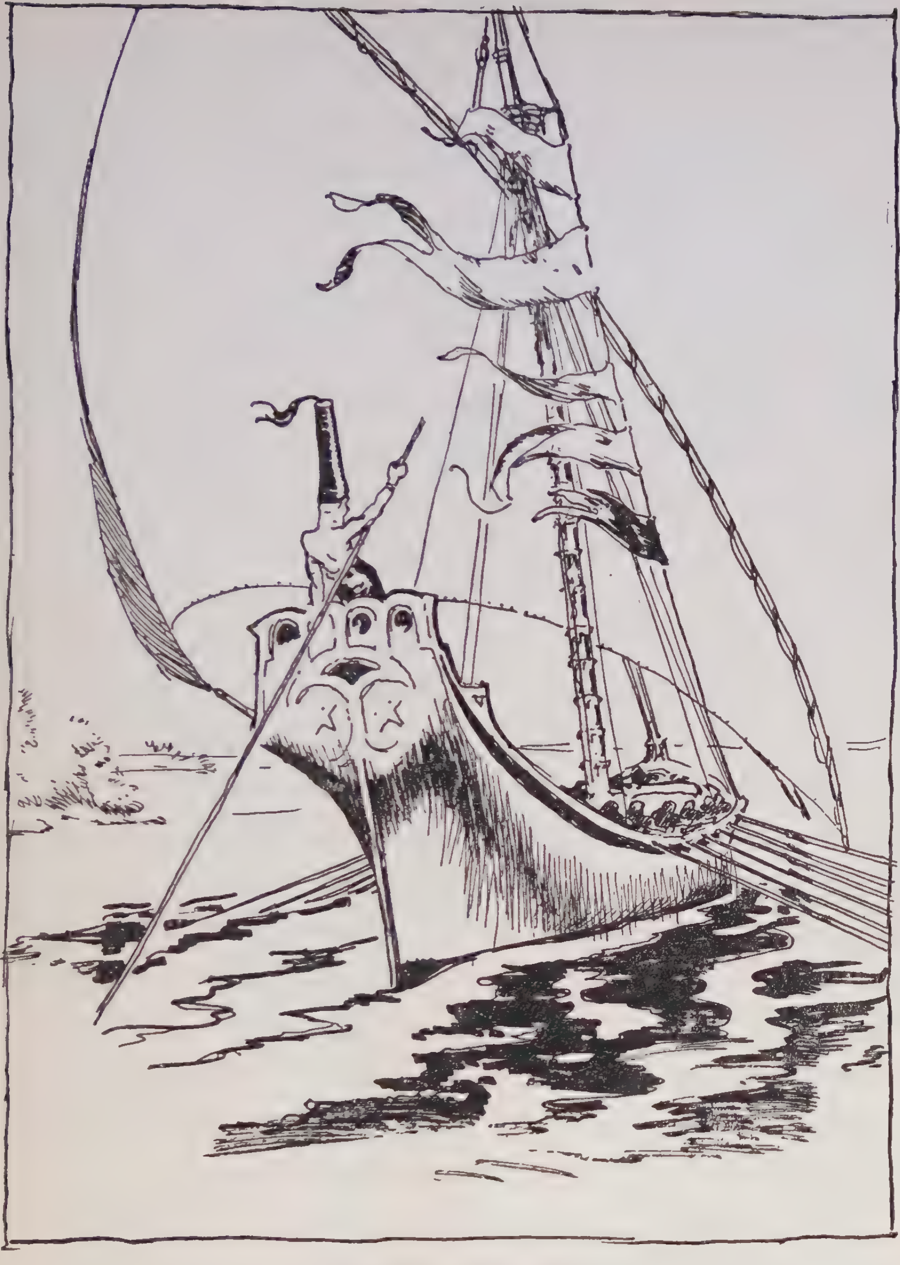
Chapter Five

"There, there, not too bozzy!" warned the Sultan, as Chinda pushed Tuzzle out of his path and strode haughtily from the throne room. Then, as the Grand Vizier, muttering with vexation, rushed in the opposite direction, the Sultan hugged Confido tightly to his breast.

"Stupid fools!" wheezed the fat sovereign breathlessly. "They think I want the camel. It's not the camel we want, little treasure, but what's in the camel's left hand saddle sack. Without that package I am lost, ruined, done for. How much longer must I wait and worry? Why, oh, wherefore did I ever let that package out of my hands or ever stow it in such a place?" Confido shook his head and licked the Sultan sympathetically on the nose, and much comforted his Majesty thumped upon the golden gong at his side and called in a loud voice for his afternoon coffee.

Meanwhile, so well were the orders of the very Grand Vizier carried out that when the orange crescent moon rose over the turrets and domes of the Sultan's city, the Royal Sampan, fully loaded and ready for the journey, tugged impatiently at its golden chain. Not one, but twenty satin robes for Tuzzle, twenty fine embroidered shawls as a gift for

Ozma of Oz, twenty roast fowl and twenty baskets of provisions had been stowed in the cushioned cabin of the ship. Under the orange awnings forward, a tremendous deck chair had been placed for the Grand Vizier, and a table beside the chair was heaped with apricots, figs, dates, oranges, almonds, and sweetmeats of every description, for Tuzzle had no intention of starving on the voyage. Rubbing his hands complacently, the Grand Vizier regarded everything with bland approval, for he anticipated a tranquil and pleasant trip and had always wished to visit the court of Ozma. Though no one in the Emerald City had ever heard of Samandra, the Samandrans, being one of the most ancient races in all Oz, knew all about the Emerald City and the famous folk who lived there. Samandra, you must know, lies at the very top of the Winkie Country, bordered on the North by the Deadly Desert and on the South by the Winkie River, and is directly between the Kingdoms of Corabia and Corumbia. But for five hundred years all three countries have been under the rule of the wily Sultan, who by some strange magic conquered both of his kingly neighbors, stole all their treasures, and transformed all their subjects. Carrying most of the treasure by



The Royal Sampan

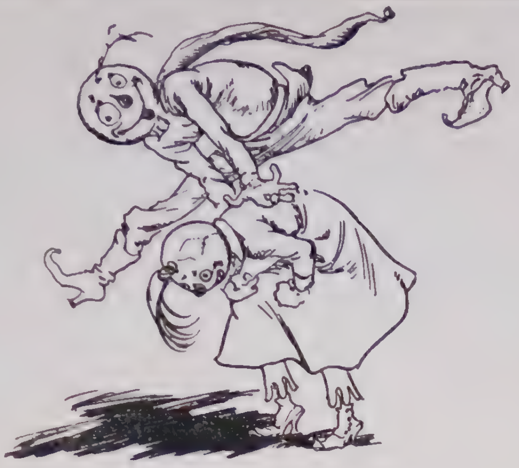
caravan to Samandra, he let the conquered Kingdoms severely alone, and uncared for and deserted they have lain for long dusty centuries, their little villages overgrown with weeds, and their stately capitals fast falling to ruin and decay.

Samandra itself, though largely made up of a golden-sanded desert, has many fertile valleys and plains—lovely flowerful spots, gay in the spring with daffodils and lotus, having an abundance of orange groves, date, palm and fig trees—so that life there is very lazy and luxurious. Though most of the Samandrans are more than seven centuries old, they do not show their age at all and are as happy and handsome a people as you could wish to find anywhere. The Sultan himself was as happy as any, except for occasional spells of remorse when he thought of his wicked treatment of the Corumbians and Corabians. But even this did not seriously interfere with his pleasure until he lost his favorite camel in a sudden sand storm. Since then he had not known a peaceful moment and had so harassed his slaves, his attendants, and advisors, that life in the yellow castle had become well nigh unbearable.

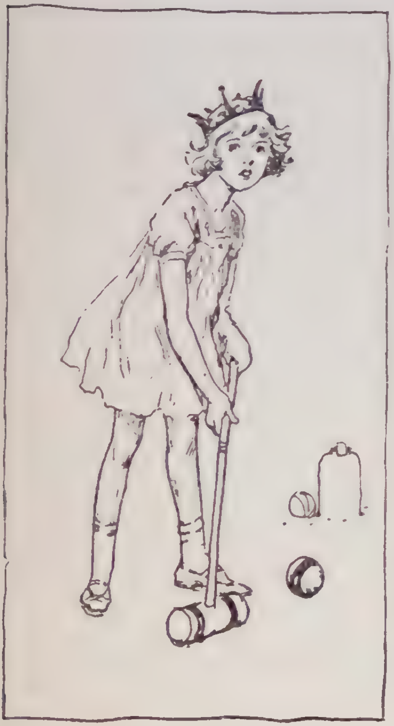
"But now," thought the fat little rascal, rolling off his silken couch long before sunup, "now all my worries are over. In three or four days this wretched beast will be safely restored to me." Picking up Confido, he told the little dog in an earnest whisper just where he would stow the precious package once it was in his hands again. Then, without waiting for his body servants to come and dress him, he struggled into his royal robes, and with each of his yellow shoes on the wrong foot shuffled down to the Winkie River to speed Tuzzle upon his mission. By the time he reached the royal dock, the orange sails of the sampan were snapping in the wind. Tuzzle, having given orders to cast off, was already asleep in the deck chair forward, fanned by ten of his faithful servitors. At the Sultan's loud cries he opened one eye and waved his plump hand reassuringly.

"Before the fire dies four times upon the hearthstones, we will return with the sacred camel," promised the Grand Vizier in his oily voice. And while Confido barked and the Sultan called further frantic orders and entreaties, the Royal Sampan slipped smoothly round a bend in the river and disappeared. If you have an Oz map handy, you will see that the Winkie River winds in a lazy fashion through the Great Empire of the East, turning here and then there till it comes finally to the outskirts of the Emerald City itself. Drifting gently with the tide, Tuzzle and his twenty slaves arrived a little before sundown on the second evening at Ozma's lovely capital. Tying their boat to a willow on the edge of the stream, the Samandrans stepped ashore, and Tuzzle, arrayed in his grandest garb, prepared to present himself to the ruler of all Oz.

TUZZLE AT THE COURT OF OZ



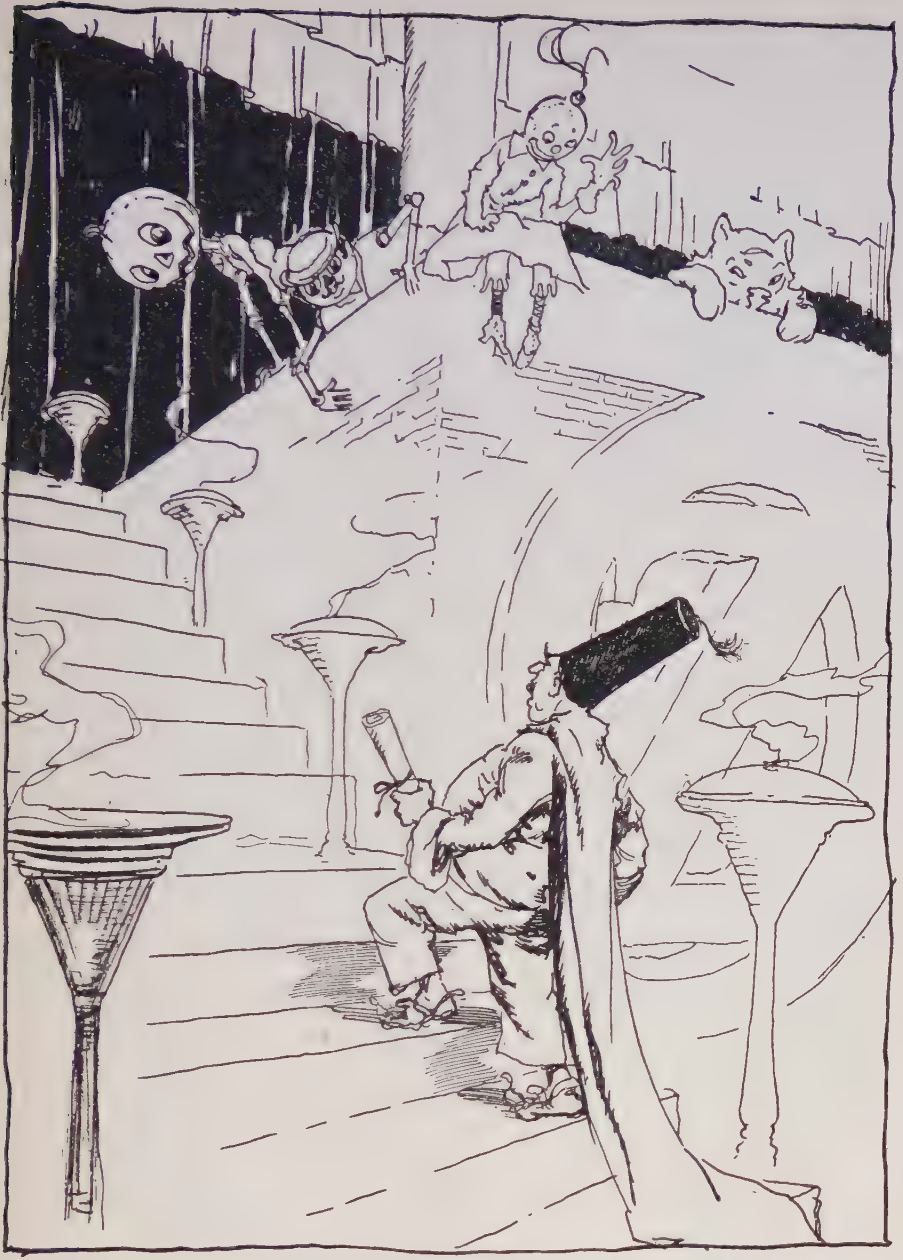
CHAPTER SIX



ABOUT fifteen minutes later, Bettsy and Dorothy, looking up from a game of croquet on the palace lawn, dropped their gold mallets and simply stared, for moving toward them under the lime-drop trees was a perfectly amazing procession. First came eight tall, splendid slaves bearing flowering orange branches, then the very Grand Vizier of Samandra in a very grand sedan chair, carried by four more slaves; back of him stepped the eight other slaves bearing the twenty embroidered shawls. Tuzzle, on his part, was as amazed as the little girls, for though he was accustomed to comfort and even elegance at the Sultan's court, the Emerald City so surpassed in beauty and magnificence any place he had ever seen or visited that he had done nothing but grunt and exclaim with admiration and surprise as he was rapidly borne along the jewelled streets of Ozma's lovely capital. By the time he reached the castle itself, he had barely breath enough to speak.

"Princess!" puffed the Grand Vizier, as his chair came opposite Dorothy, whom he instantly recognized, "Princess, I would speak with the Queen of Oz."

"Certainly! Certainly!" stuttered Dorothy, reaching up hastily for her crown, which she had hung on the branch of a tulip tree, while Bettsy in her interest and excitement tripped over a wicket and sat down. But picking herself up quickly the little girl ran ahead to announce the arrival of distinguished visitors, so that by the time the procession reached the castle, Ozma was already seated upon her throne, waiting with dignity to welcome them.



TUZZLE AT THE COURT OF OZ

"Your Majesty," began Tuzzle, stepping pompously from the sedan chair and bending himself almost in half, "his Serene Highness, the Sultan of Samandra, sends you his royal loyal greetings and salutations."

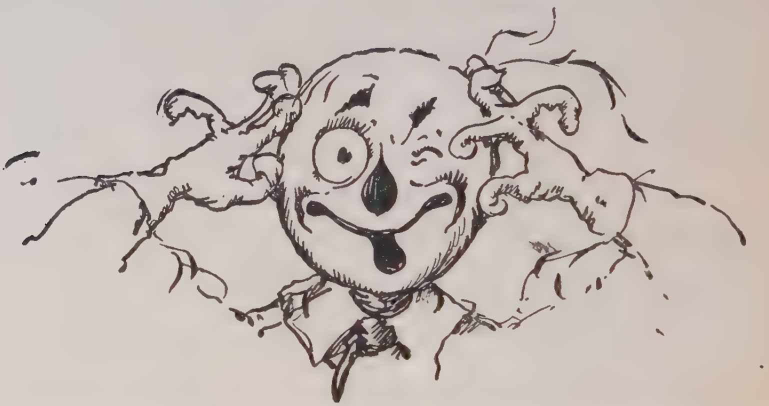
"The greetings of his Highness are graciously received," answered Ozma kindly, though she had never heard of the Sultan in her whole life. "And what is it his Serene Highness desires of us?" she inquired, with a curious glance at the Samandran slaves. Long experience at ruling had taught her that strange sovereigns seldom sent gifts unless they wanted something in return.

"His Highness," continued Tuzzle, a little embarrassed by Ozma's frank query, "desires nothing more valuable than a camel. This camel was lost in a great sand storm and has been missing ten long years from the royal herd. It is the favorite mount of his Excellency, so kind and comfortable a creature that since its loss our sovereign has been inconsolable. After countless unsuccessful searches, Chinda, our Chief Prophet and Seer has, with the aid of a magic telescope, caught a glimpse of the beast in your Majesty's stable." Casting down his eyes, Tuzzle waited anxiously for Ozma to speak.

"Why, it must be the Comfortable Camel Sir Hokus brought to the Emerald City long ago!" exclaimed Dorothy, with a little hop of excitement. "Come on, let's go ask him."

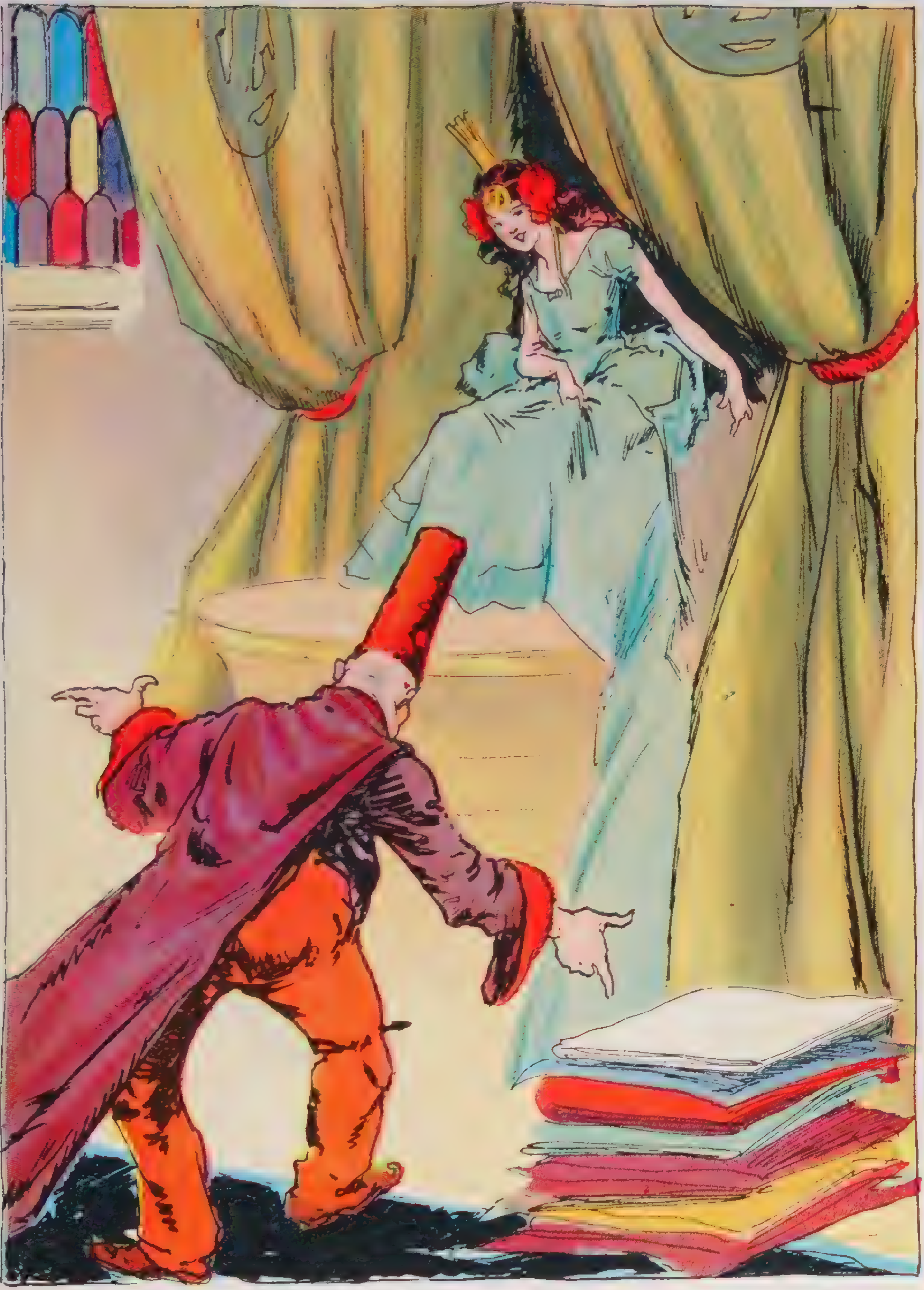
"Well, it will do no harm," answered Ozma, readily enough. "And if our Comfortable Camel really belongs to the Sultan of Samandra, and really wishes to return to his master, I see no reason why he should not do so, though we'll be sorry indeed to lose him."

"Very good, your Highness!" mumbled Tuzzle, who was a little confused by the informal procedure at Ozma's court. Scraps, Trot, and the Scarecrow were playing leap frog at one end of the throne room. Tik Tok and the Cowardly Lion were running races at the other, and all the rest of the celebrities were grouped about the Lost King and the Soldier with Green Whiskers, who were in the midst of an exciting game of checkers. But when Ozma and the Grand Vizier started for the Royal Stables, they all stopped what they were doing and trooped along, causing Tuzzle much anxiety and uneasiness by their boisterous skips, vigorous claps upon the back, and continuous friendly questioning. But when the company reached the stall usually occupied by the Comfortable Camel, it was empty, and though grooms and stable boys were dispatched in every direction, no trace of the kindly creature could be found. The Doubtful Dromedary knew nothing of his whereabouts, and when a page was sent to question Sir Hokus, he reported that the Good Knight of Oz was also missing from his apartment. It was, as a matter of fact, the day after Sir Hokus had started upon his quest, but everyone in the palace had been so occupied preparing to accompany him that they had not missed the Good Knight at all.



"Perhaps Sir Hokus has taken the camel to the next village for supplies," suggested Trot, and after many speculations and conjectures they all agreed that she might be right.

"Never fear, they'll both be back," predicted the Scarecrow, winking cheerfully at the Grand Vizier,



"His Highness desires nothing more valuable than a camel"—*Chapter 6*

"and meanwhile, why not enjoy our hospitality? No, you seem to be well stuffed already," he observed, thumping Tuzzle upon the chest.

"Nay, nay, the Sultan can illy spare me," muttered the Grand Vizier. "I must return at once!" And stepping into his sedan chair he motioned for the slaves to start.

"And what about the shawls?" demanded Scraps, who had taken a great fancy to a white one embroidered in scarlet. "It's not our fault the Comfortable Camel has gone away."

"Sh—h! Sh—h!" warned Ozma, shaking her finger reprovingly at the Patchwork Girl, while Dorothy and Bettsy giggled in spite of themselves. "As soon as the Comfortable Camel returns we shall send a message to your illustrious master," promised Ozma, bowing politely to Tuzzle. "I am sure it will not be longer than a week."

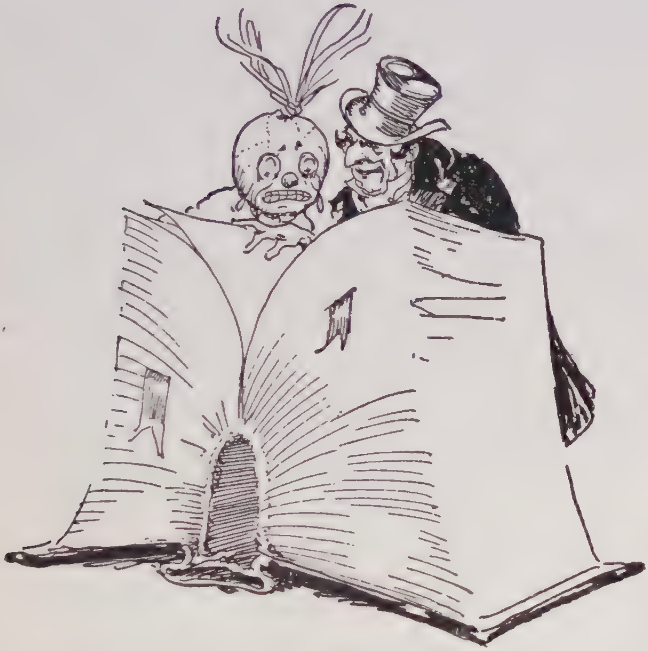
"Well, in that case," wheezed the very Grand Vizier ungraciously, "I hope your Majesty will accept this small gift from the Sultan."

"With pleasure," smiled Ozma, but before the slaves had time to present the shawls, Scraps snatched all twenty and throwing one to Dorothy, one to Trot, and one to Bettsy, dropped the rest in

Ozma's lap and, wrapping herself tightly in the red and white one, whirled madly round and round Tuzzle. Fearing to linger longer at a court where animals conversed as sensibly as people, and such strange conduct was permitted, Tuzzle scrambled into his sedan chair. Bidding Ozma a hasty farewell, he ordered his attendants to carry him at once to the Royal Sampan. This they did, and at such a brisk run that the Oz folk burst into loud cheers of admiration and approval, for considering the size and weight of the very Grand Vizier, the speed of his slaves was remarkable.

"Do you think the Comfortable Camel really belongs to this Sultan?" asked Dorothy, as the last Samandran disappeared from view.

"Let's look in the magic picture!" suggested Bettsy Bobbin. "Let's see what he's like and find out where Sir Hokus and the Comfortable Camel have gone, too." As this seemed a sensible plan, they all hurried up into Ozma's sitting room. The magic picture, as most all of us know, is one of the most important of Ozma's treasures. She has but to ask the magic picture where a person is, and immediately he is shown in the exact country or city where he happens to be at the time of the question. So, with the celebrities looking breathlessly over her shoulder, Ozma pulled the cord that drew aside the curtain covering the picture, and said quietly, "Show us the Comfortable Camel." But stars! Nothing at all happened, for the magic picture was not there, and with little exclamations of alarm and dismay they gazed at the empty space on the wall.



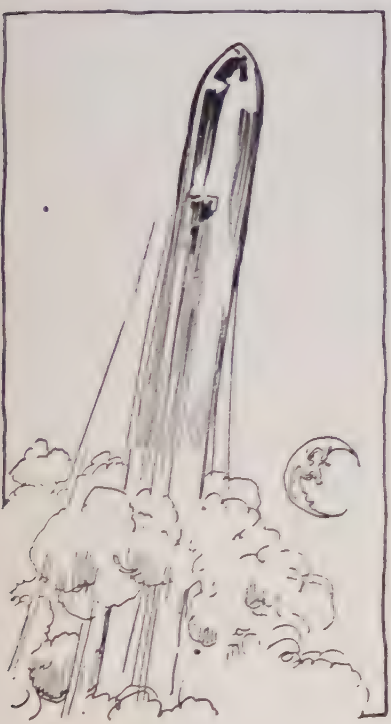
"Who can have taken it?" cried Dorothy indignantly.

"Call the Wizard," shrilled the Scarecrow, and ran off, himself, to fetch him. But the Wizard, deep in his preparations for the Good Knight's quest, could throw no light upon the subject at all. In the huge encyclopaedia of Oz they did learn a bit about Samandra, its ruler and its customs, but of the whereabouts of the Comfortable Camel, of Sir Hokus of Pokes, or the famous picture of Oz, even the Wizard's magic could tell them nothing.

"But do not despair," begged the little man earnestly, that night at dinner. "I have almost perfected a new and marvelous invention. If our Good Knight and Comfortable Camel do not soon return, and if the magic picture is not found or discovered, I will seek them out with the help of my powerful searchlight. This searchlight, shot like an ordinary shell from a cannon, will travel all over Oz until it finds what it is sent for and then flash back with the exact location of the missing objects and people." Taking them down to his laboratory, the Wizard endeavored to explain the strange rays and phosphorescent material to be used in this latest magic contrivance. It was a little difficult to understand, but Ozma and her courtiers had great confidence in the Wizard's powers and, much cheered and comforted, they went off to bed.

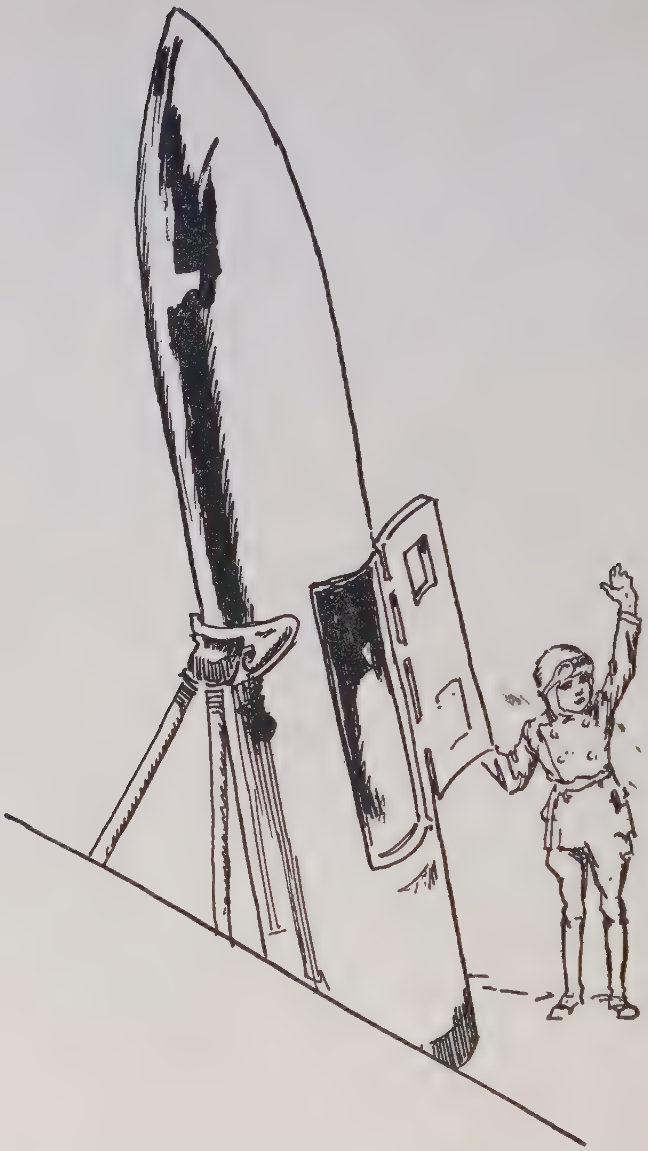
THE CRUISE OF THE SKY-ROCKET

CHAPTER SEVEN



"ARE you sure it's all right this time, Uncle Billy? And will it take us straight to Mars?" Tightening the strap on his leather helmet, the boy looked up at the tall man who was going over, for the last time, the strange craft that was to carry them on an exploration of the sky.

"Well," answered the tall man, wiping his hands on



THE SKYROCKET

a piece of waste, "it may not take us straight, Speedy, but we'll get there somehow. I've calculated the distance down to the last inch, and if I can keep her pointed straight up and northward we'll be on Mars by to-morrow morning. I'm not sure yet that I ought to take you, but on the other hand, I don't see how I can leave you behind."

"Neither do I." Speedy spoke with feeling and finality. "You're the only one I've got, and I'm the only one you've got, so we'd better stick together, don't you think?" Uncle Billy nodded soberly, for Speedy was an orphan and had lived with him since he was a little fellow of two. The boy's real name was Bill, but his quickness on the track and baseball field had earned him the nickname of Speedy. At ten he was such a good chum and so helpful with Uncle Billy's inventions that the great scientist could not bear to leave him behind on this, the most important of his undertakings.

"It isn't as if there was any real danger," he mused, tapping the steel sides of the torpedo. "In this we'll be as safe as if we were on a trolley car."

"Safer!" exclaimed Speedy scornfully. "Oh, come on, Uncle Billy, set her off! I can hardly wait!" It was a bright, clear May morning, the weather and wind conditions just right, and Uncle Billy, as eager as Speedy to be off, helped the boy into the back seat and prepared to light the fuse that would send them skyward. The Skyrocket, as you've probably guessed, was a flying torpedo, and the explosion of the rocket attached to the tail would carry them straight and swiftly to the stars.

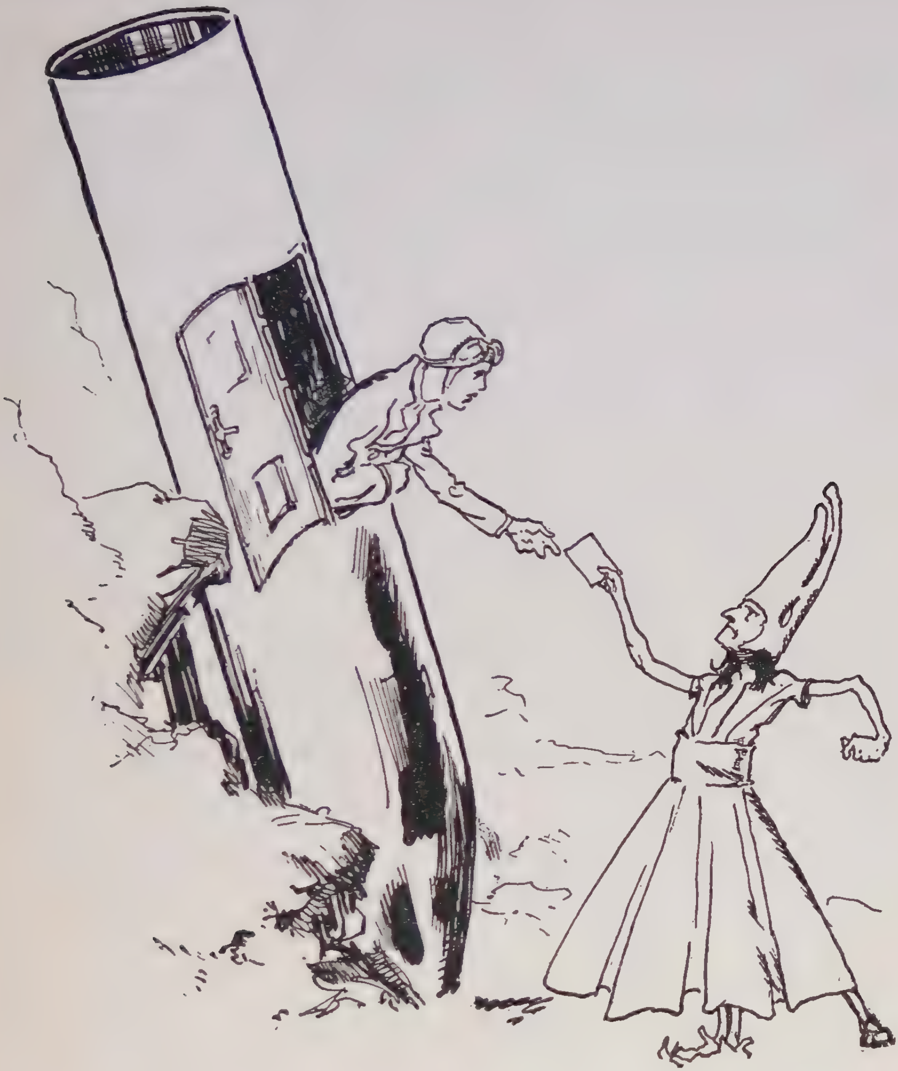
"Now then," puffed Uncle Billy, with a quick glance at the Skyrocket's gears and brakes. "Remember! As soon as I jump in, slam down the top and slide the bolts. And if anything should happen, though of course it won't, pull the lever on your right. That will release the parashuter. Press the button in the parashuter and it will carry you safely down to earth. All ready?"

Speedy nodded, clutching both sides of the leather seat, tense with excitement. He could hear the hiss and sputter as the electric lighter touched the fuse of the rocket. In one second more Uncle Billy would be in the driver's seat, the steel re-enforced lid of the torpedo ship would be down, the oxygen sprays, to keep them in comfort during the long trip, would start, and they would be off like a flash on their journey through the air. With a tremulous gasp, Speedy looked over his shoulder. As he did, there came a terrific jolt, and with an ear splitting explosion the Skyrocket shot up toward the clouds. But Uncle Billy! Where in heck was Uncle Billy? Almost torn from his seat by the force of the start, Speedy looked desperately downward; then, as the wind ripped and tore past his head, he slammed the top of the torpedo and jumped into the front seat.

Uncle Billy had not been quick enough. Uncle Billy had been left behind. Forgetting all about the parashuter, forgetting everything except that he was tearing through space at a terrific rate toward a strange and undiscovered world, the boy grasped the steering wheel and gave it a sharp twist. His one thought was to get back to earth and pick up his uncle. With a sickening swerve the Skyrocket turned and sped downward so swiftly that Speedy, with his face glued to the thick glass window, could see nothing but a flying blur. A flash of green told him they were nearing earth, a tiny figure wildly waving its arms became visible, but only for the fraction of a second; then, with a frightful impact, the Skyrocket hit the flying field back of Speedy's Long Island home, broke through, and bored its way tumultuously downward, down through the dark, pathless depths of the underearth! The splintering crash of the torpedo, as it ripped and tore through roots, rocks, and metal, almost deafened the boy, and the violent vibration made him faint and dizzy. Mechanically he grasped the wheel and despairingly wondered what would ever become of him. Too late he realized that the torpedo could not be stopped until the force of the rocket was spent. Why hadn't he jumped with the parashuter, as soon as he discovered that Uncle Billy was not aboard? It was pitch-dark inside, and as the roar of the Skyrocket grew louder Speedy touched an electric button. The cheery glow of the small lamps in the ceiling comforted him a little, but the vicious shake and rumble of the car made thinking almost impossible. Snake-like roots flashed past the window and snapped against the glass. Through rock strata streaked with gold, copper, coal, and silver, the Skyrocket splintered a pathway, and once they dove into a boiling mass of lava; the steel walls of the ship grew so hot that Speedy gave himself up for lost, but as the heat grew unbearable they plunged with a hiss into a deep, oily, underground sea filled with phosphorescent fish and terrifying monsters. Crouched behind the wheel, poor Speedy gasped, blinked, and shuddered. Would he go straight through the earth and drop out into nothingness on the other side? But just then the Skyrocket hit a particularly impervious piece of rock, and the ship gave such a bounce and backward leap that Speedy was flung out of the seat and knocked quite senseless. How long or how far he traveled in this helpless condition he never did discover; in fact he knew nothing at all till loud hammers and thumps on the outside of the torpedo finally aroused him. Surprised to find himself alive at all, he sat up and looked uncertainly around. The Skyrocket had really stopped. Strange square faces peered in through the window and motioned to him through the glass. Where on earth was he? Was he on the earth at all? Doubtfully Speedy stared up at the strangers; then, as the supply of oxygen was exhausted, and the air inside hot and stifling, he rose unsteadily, threw back the bolt and lifted up the top of the torpedo. Looking down into the faces of the curious crowd surrounding the Skyrocket, he wondered what Uncle Billy would do in such a situation. But the strangers stared so hard and so unblinkingly that he could think of nothing more remarkable than, "Where am I?" This question, spoken in his ordinary tone of voice, burst like three sharp explosions on the quiet air, echoing and reverberating till the crowd covered their ears and fell away from him in terror.

Astonished at the loudness of his own voice, Speedy swayed backwards himself. Then, as he was debating whether to stay in the ship or to alight and try to find out where he was, a little square-faced fellow separated himself from his companions and slowly approached him. He had scribbled something on a card, and handing the card to Speedy he hastily scuttled back to his place.

"Lower your voice," directed the card in a nervous scrawl. "You are in Subterranea." Very much relieved to find he could understand the language of this odd race of underearth dwellers, Speedy nodded to show that he understood, and rather timidly the Subterraneans began to draw nearer. They were undersized, thin and undernourished little fellows, but dressed with great magnificence in metal-cloth robes, tall, stiff headdresses and shoes of pure gold, decorated with precious stones. Their square, not unpleasant faces were almost granite in color and though not of stone, seemed hard and mummy-like. Probably from this queer air and no sun, decided Speedy, staring at them with frank curiosity, and beginning to think that Subterranea might prove almost as interesting as Mars.

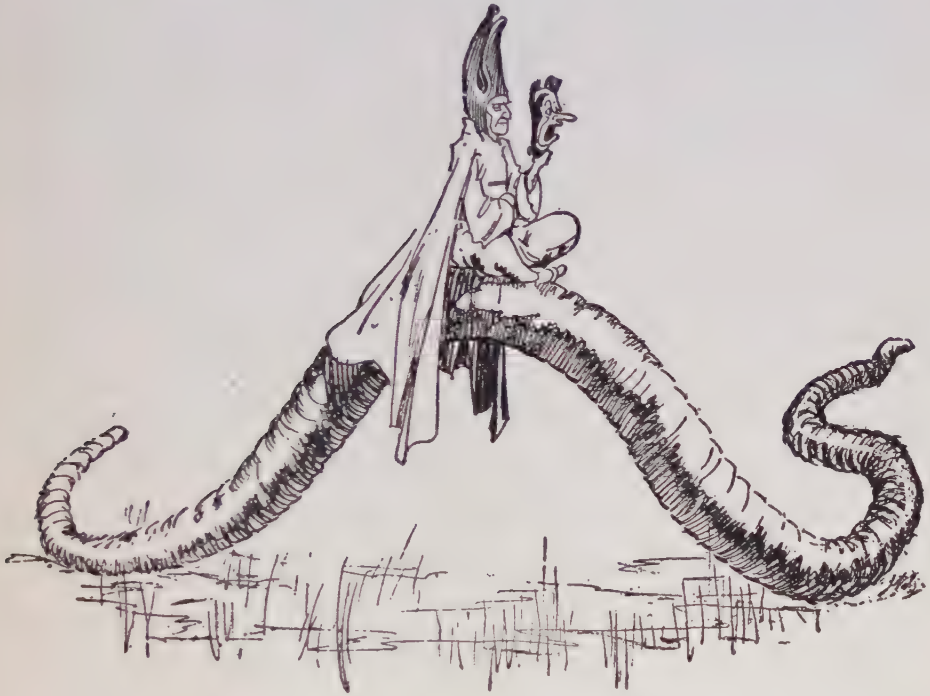


He had scribbled something on a card

The Skyrocket had come to a stop in the public square of this quaint underground city. Crooked pillars of irregular rock held up the blue stone sky in which the torpedo had cut a terrible gash. Radium stars in the sky sent out a misty phosphorescent glow. From the square, arched passageways branched out in every direction, not unlike the subways at home, except that they were much higher and lighter, beautifully tiled, and decorated with precious stones. Speedy was about to whisper a question, when a loud trumpet blast made him turn quickly to the left.

"The Shah!" hissed the square faces impressively. "His Imperial Lowness, the Shah!" And waving their arms they bent down all together, like a field of wheat swept by a sudden wind. Wide-eyed with interest, Speedy saw an important little man dressed all in cloth of gold, with a headdress at least a yard high. He was seated cross-legged on a giant blue earthworm. It was as large and ugly as a sea serpent and its center section was raised to form a comfortable seat for the queer little monarch. On either side walked gorgeously attired attendants waving metal flags. As the great earthworm came to a stop, the Shah glanced inquiringly at Speedy, next up at the hole in the sky, and then, leaning down, took from the slave at his right a large mask and held it up to his face. The mask wore a ferocious scowl and Speedy began to feel rather uncomfortable.

"Oh pshaw, Shah!" he whispered in an embarrassed wheeze, "how could I help breaking through the roof?" Instead of answering, the Shah clapped his hands twice and handed the mask back to the slave. Now out stepped a stiff little Subterranean, whom Speedy quite rightly guessed to be the Chief



Counsellor of the Shah. He seemed also to be a rhymer of no mean ability, and in low rapid verses began to drone out the following:

"The Shah! The Shah! Of SubterraneAH!
In the tenth year of his splendid subter reign;
And whom the Shah displeases, his Headman quickly seizes
And hurls instanter from the Shah's domain!
I'm his Headman, as you see, all his subjects bow to me,
My name is Rhomba, see that you attend,
Why have you come at all? Did you fly or jump or fall,
Are you interloper, enemy, or friend?"

"Friend," answered Speedy in a low voice, and chuckling in spite of himself. But his answer did not seem to appease his Imperial Lowness at all. Looking again at the hole in his sky, he took up the frowning mask and turned it again toward the boy.

"Gosh!" thought Speedy uneasily, "I've certainly got to do some tall explaining; now what in Sam Hill shall I tell them?" All the little men were staring at him expectantly, and the one who had given him the card whispered aside to the monarch.

"I think, from his high voice, he must be one of those Upperdwellers."

"Speak, Upperdweller," hissed Rhomba, while the Shah changed his frowning mask for one whose blank expression upset Speedy even more than the frown. But remembering that he was the nephew of a famous scientist, and the holder of several records for high jumps and track events, he pulled himself together and in a calm whisper explained how the Skyrocket, in which he and Uncle Billy had intended to explore the sky, had gone off without the inventor; how he had turned the ship downward and crashed through to the center of the earth and landed in Subterranea through no intention or fault of his own. During this recital the Shah changed his mask twice. The first showed faint surprise, but the mask held up and slightly awry as Speedy finished his story was frankly yawning. Smothering his resentment at such treatment, Speedy went on hurriedly, "You see, if Uncle Billy had just been a little quicker, we'd have gone up instead of down and I'd never have come here at all. It was just a mix-up," he concluded earnestly.

"Mix-down," corrected Rhomba severely, as the Shah shook his head to show that the explanation was not satisfactory. Then, making several strange signals to his Headman, he tapped the earthworm with his heels and moved grandly and unconcernedly out of the square.

"Well?" inquired Speedy in a defiant whisper, as the Shah disappeared down a long, dim, blue tunnel.

"He doubts the truth of all you say;
But mend the sky and you can stay
And work upon the realm's defences—
If not, you'll take the consequences!"

"And what are the consequences?" asked Speedy in a faint voice, for he had no desire to work for this crude little King.

"Well," answered Rhomba, with a careless wave of his hand, "we usually throw lawbreakers to the fire fish in Lava Lake, and I suppose sky breakers might be called lawbreakers, too."

"Lava Lake!" exclaimed Speedy, beginning to feel downright frightened. "But see here, how am I going to mend a great jagged hole like that? Why, I can't even reach it!" In his indignation he forgot to whisper, and at the terrible racket made by his voice the Subterraneans took to their gold heels. That is, all except Rhomba, who seemed to feel it his duty to remain.

"That's your affair," he muttered indifferently. "You broke the sky—now mend it!" Switching his stiff robes from side to side, the Shah's Chief Headman followed the others, leaving Speedy all alone in the center of the square. His first impulse was to run, but a short dash down one of the tiled passageways convinced him that he would be lost in no time.

Every few yards it turned and twisted and was intersected by other tunnels, and a body might as well have hoped to find his way out of a labyrinth. Picking his way slowly back to the square, Speedy was surprised to see one of the Shah’s subjects sitting on a green bench near the Skyrocket.

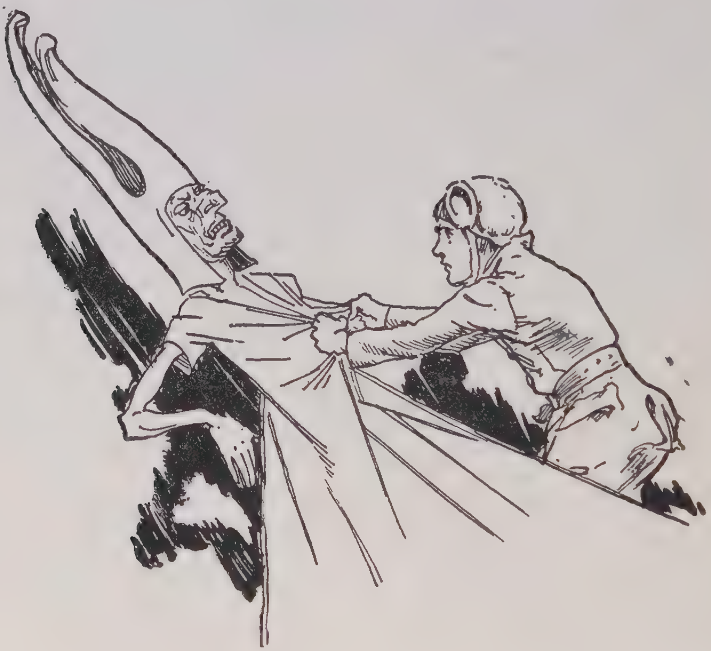
“My name is Zunda,” whispered the little fellow, coming eagerly toward Speedy. “Perhaps I can help you, but I beg of you not to shout. It is so—so shattering. Tell me,” he continued, before Speedy had time to say a word, “ did you see anything of the other Underground Kingdoms on your way down? I have never traveled myself and am curious to know all.”

“Are there other Kingdoms?” asked Speedy in a depressed whisper. “I only saw a lot of roots, rocks, underground seas, and lava. Are there more countries down here?”

“Oh, yes! Yes, indeed!” And clutching Speedy’s arm, Zunda began to drone out like a schoolboy reciting a lesson: “The Underworld is divided into nine levels. First there is Neath and Underneath; then Low and Below. After that come Down, Upsidedown, Farther Down and Allthewaydown. Then Subterranea. We’re about as low as you can get,” he finished boastfully.

"Yes?" murmured Speedy, trying to appear interested. "But don't you think we'd better talk about mending this hole in the sky?"

"What's the use of talking about that?" answered Zunda, with a little shrug. "It just can't be done. Now do tell me something about Upsidedown. I hear the earthscrapers there are forty feet low."



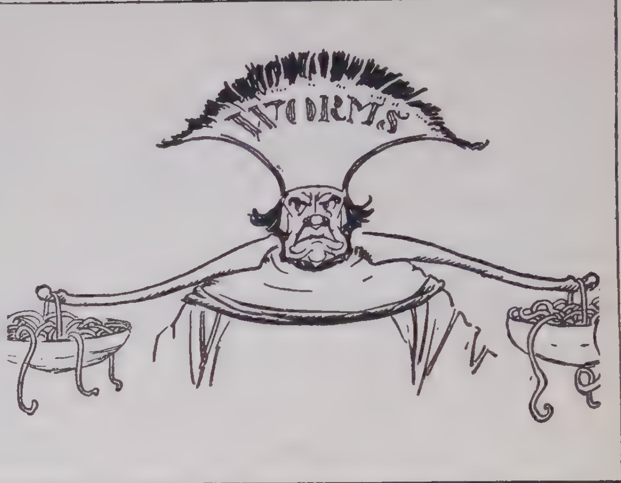
"How long will it be before—before——"

"Before you're thrown to the fire fish? Oh, not till to-morrow morning," Zunda assured him cheerfully. "That will give you time to see our city, the underwood and——"

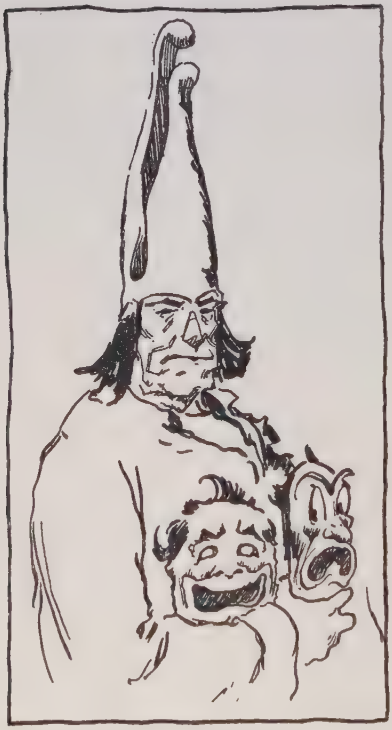
"Stop! Isn't there any way out of here?" Seizing the little Subterranean by both shoulders, Speedy gave him a desperate shake. Zunda blinked but shook his head negatively. Speedy looked gloomily up at the great rent overhead, but climbing the stone pillars was perfectly impossible. The return rocket on the torpedo had been lost on the wild downward flight, and it did seem as if he never would escape from this queer and eerie Kingdom under the earth.

"Oh, come along," urged Zunda comfortably under his breath. "You may as well see all you can before ——before——" Feeling Speedy's violent shudder, he tactfully did not finish the sentence, but drew the little boy hurriedly across the square.

A GOLDEN PRINCESS



CHAPTER EIGHT

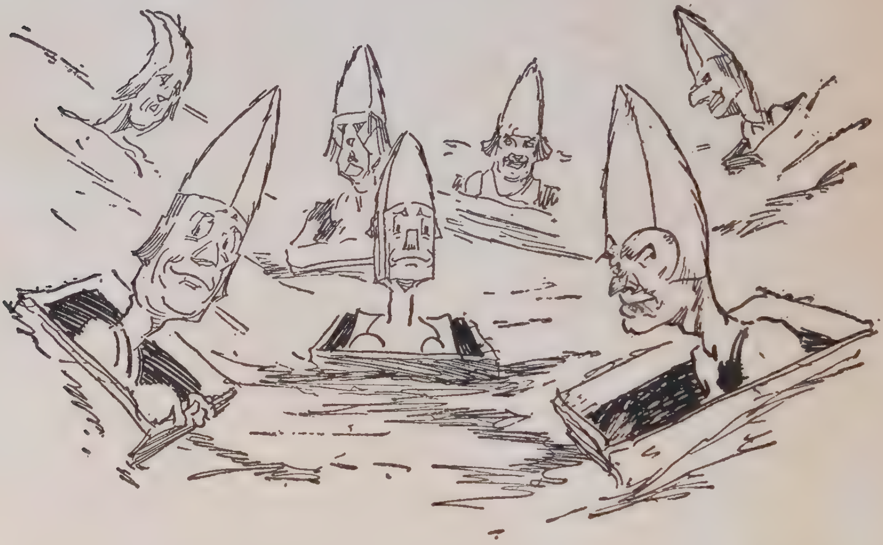


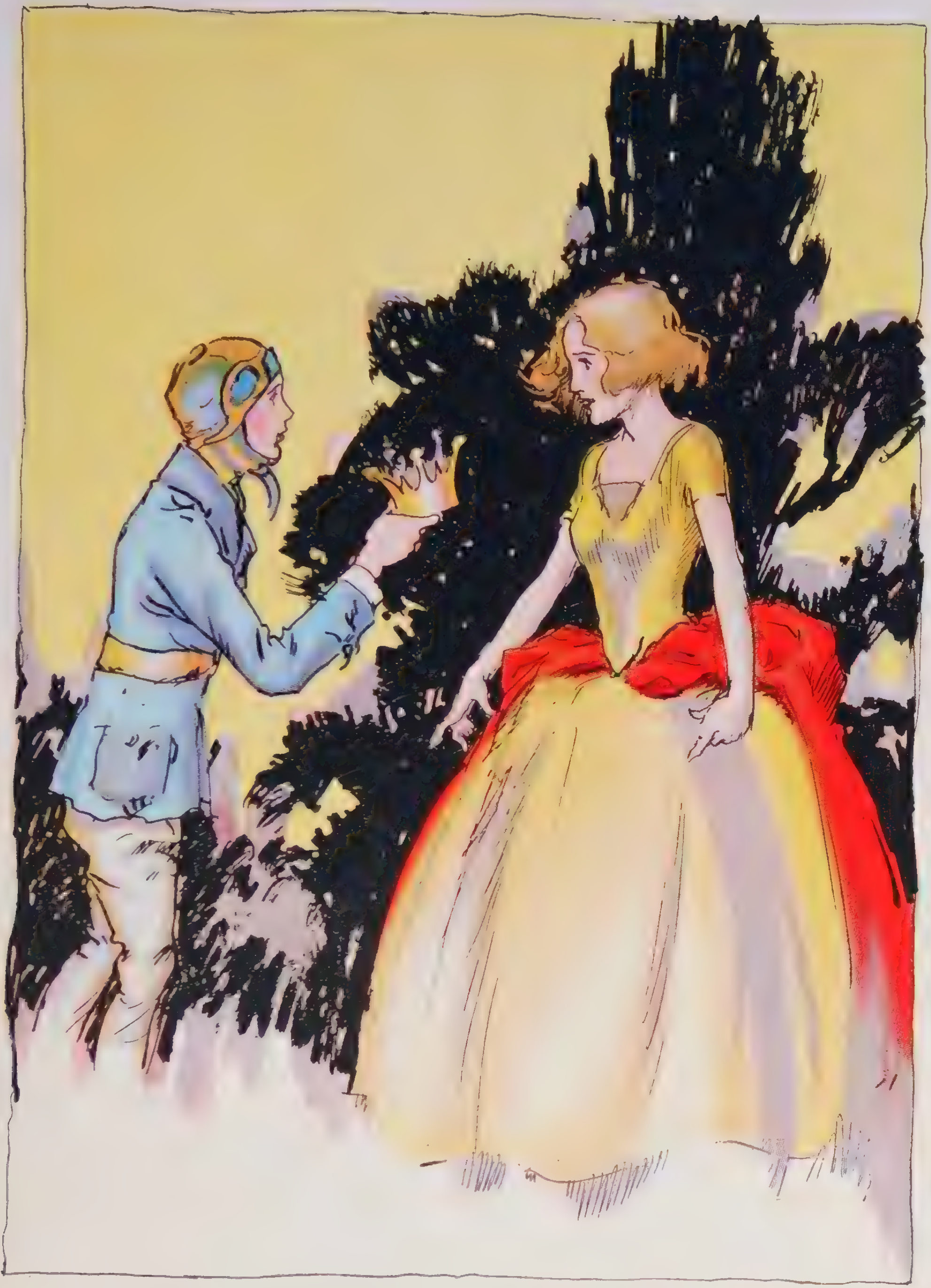
"I SUPPOSE you are wondering why our Shah never speaks," murmured Zunda, as they came to the end of one of the twisting tunnels. Then, as Speedy, too worried to wonder, made no reply, he confided importantly, "He is saving his voice so he never uses it; and he wears masks to express pleasure or displeasure to save his face."

"Well, if I had a face like

his, I'd not bother to save it," said Speedy crossly, and as Zunda went on asking him questions and quite calmly answering them himself, the boy tried to think of some way out of his dreadful difficulties. "These fellows aren't very big," he thought shrewdly, "and when they try to throw me in this Lava Lake, I'll tackle them by two's. I'll scream like fury, for that seems to upset them, and maybe if I'm quick I can knock out this Shah and Rhomba and make the rest of them behave. Why, I might even become their ruler!" he reflected suddenly. "Then I can sit tight till somebody comes down here to rescue me." Speedy felt sure that Uncle Billy would organize a search party and follow him down the great shaft cut by the Skyrocket. Immensely cheered, he began to look around with a little more interest. "I wonder what they eat down here," he thought curiously, for if he was to remain any time this would be an important thing to know. As if to answer his question, a squat underground peddler, with a huge basket on each arm, turned in from another tunnel. Opening the lid of one of the baskets he proudly indicated the contents. It seemed several days since breakfast and Speedy, hoping it would be fruit or cakes, looked in eagerly. With a violent shudder he jumped back, for the basket was full of writhing, squirming, wriggling earthworms.

"Very tasty in a stew," smiled Zunda, as the peddler held up two long and particularly curly ones. But Speedy shook his head and waving the peddler away hurried along the tunnel, his nose scornfully in the air. Along the edges of the strange passageway, flagstone trapdoors in the floor kept opening and shutting, and Zunda explained that these were the entrances to the underground homes of his kinsmen. As they marched along, inquisitive heads popped up like Jack-in-the-Boxes and some of the





"I WAS SORT OF SURPRISED WHEN YOU CAME TO LIFE"—*Chapter 8*

bolder Subterraneans came out altogether and pattered cautiously after them, so that by the time they had come to the end of the passage quite a crowd had collected. They seemed perfectly friendly so Speedy paid no attention to them. Besides, he was much more interested in the strange vista opening out ahead.

"The Royal Hunting Ground of his Supreme Lowness, the Shah!" explained Zunda, with a sweeping wave of his left arm. "The deep, dark underwood where the gropers grope, the dragons drag, and Lava Lake boils on forever!" This last information, conveyed in a tense whisper, made Speedy decidedly uncomfortable, but to show that he was not easily frightened he stepped boldly into the underwood. Here the brown and green rock formations took the shape of gnarled and twisted trees. Phosphorescent material clung like vines to their trunks, shedding a weird, goblinish glow. Giant stone mushrooms thrust up their flat heads from the slimy ground, and in the distance Speedy could see a great lavafall tumbling smokily into the lake below.

"Well? Well?" barked Zunda, plucking nervously at his sleeve. "Have you seen enough? Come on out before a groper gets us."

"Groper?" queried Speedy, who did not want to turn back until he had seen the fire fish in Lava Lake. "What's a groper?"

"A groper is a blind dragon who lives in the dismal caverns of darkness, back of the underwood. They cannot see, but they can hear the faintest footfall, and unlucky persons carried off by gropers are never heard from again."

"Well, it wouldn't be any worse than being thrown to fire fish," muttered Speedy gloomily. "I'm going on."

"Don't! Don't, I beg of you! No one ventures beyond the lake. Why destroy yourself before your time?" warned Zunda, giving Speedy's coat another tug.

"Just the same," thought Speedy, as the little man continued to plead and pull, "it would be a pretty darn good place to hide; there might even be some way out on the other side. Thank goodness, I have my-flashlight and could explore some of the caves. Why, I might even make some important scientific discoveries. Geewhiskers, I wish Uncle Billy were down here!" With many backward glances he allowed himself to be drawn out of the Shah's hunting grounds, and when they came again to the great square his mind was still full of the mysterious caves behind the underwood. Seated on one of the green benches, he paid little attention to the chatter of Zunda or the Subterraneans, who, going about their own affairs, pattered busily to and fro. Several times the Shah himself passed on his giant undulating earthworm and each time turned his frowning mask toward Speedy.

"Cranky old crumb!" exclaimed the boy under his breath, as the stiff, gold-clad sovereign went by for the third time. "Say, what's the matter now?" for all the people in the square were scampering for shelter, tumbling down trapdoors, and even forgetting to lower their voices.

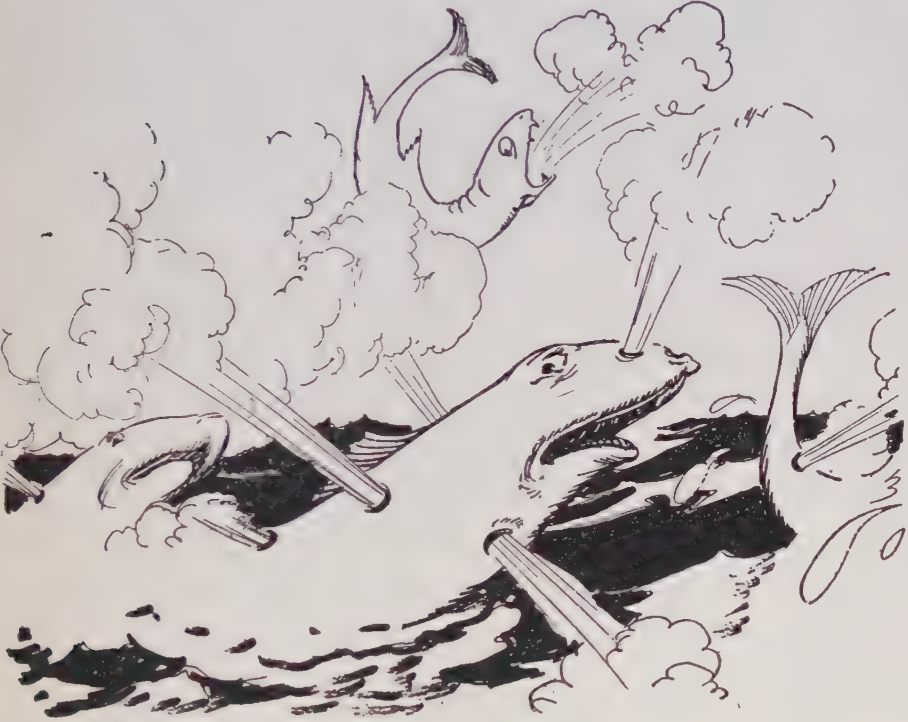
"Run! It's going to subter-rain!" screamed Zunda, bounding off the bench and disappearing in three hops like a jack rabbit. Rhomba, the Rhymer, rushed by at a gallop.

"Get under cover!" he directed breathlessly:

"When it rains in Subterranea, it pours down rays of sun,
The deadly sun that poisons one! Be quick, I tell you, *run!*"

As Speedy sprang up uncertainly, a furious downpour of sunbeams almost blinded him. But instead of running away, he expanded his chest and took long deep breaths. Never had anything felt so good. The chill, heavy air of Subterranea seemed to clear and brighten. Speedy's head cleared, too. Not an undergrounder was in sight, and resolved to make his escape before any appeared, he ran quickly through the sparkling shower. Even the underwood looked cheerful drenched by the friendly sun rays, and hurrying along under the twisted trees, Speedy fervently hoped all the dragons were asleep or otherwise occupied. Just for a moment he paused beside Lava Lake, but when the fire fish, about the size of sharks, rose hungrily to the surface and snapped their flaming teeth at him, he ran off as fast as he could, never stopping until he came to the end of the underwood and stepped into the cavernous country on the other side. The sun storm made it quite light, and Speedy, hurrying along, kept a sharp lookout for gropers. Hot springs and small geysers bubbled up here and there between the rocks and reminded him not a little of the Yellowstone country and the Grand Canyon. But suddenly, as quickly as it had started, the sun storm ceased, and without warning Speedy was left in a thick, choking darkness. At the same instant a low threatening growl rumbled over the rocks.

"Gropers!" gasped Speedy. Frantically feeling for his flashlight, he dashed headlong into the nearest cave, collided with a hard object in the center, and fell with a terrible thump to the floor. Rather slowly and doubtfully he sat up, and at last locating his



flash pressed the button to see what under the sun he had bumped into. What he saw brought him to his feet in a jiffy. Lying on its side a short distance away was a solid gold statue, the statue of a quaint little

Princess in a great stiff ruff. She was about a head taller than Speedy himself and her expression was so sweet and merry that he earnestly wished she were alive. Neither in face nor figure was she at all like the Subterraneans, and the little boy could not help wondering how the statue had come to this dark, dismal spot. Placing his flash on a ledge of rock so that it cast a good light, he tiptoed nearer and seizing the little gold hands of the Princess began to tug her to an upright position. He had succeeded in raising the statue about five inches when the Princess quite unexpectedly opened her eyes and smiled at him. Speedy was so startled that he let go her hands and she fell back with a hard bump on the rocks. Her smile changed to a look of bewilderment, and as Speedy, hastily recovering himself, seized her hands again a still more astonishing thing happened. Suddenly the hard, gold folds of her dress melted into rippling silken ones, the gold faded from her face and hands leaving them pink and rosy, the stiff, carved gold curls clustered round her lovely face lifted and lightened and began to dance and blow in the damp wind of the cave.

"Good-morrow!" said the Princess, as Speedy stared at her in open-mouthed wonder. "Are you going to help me up, or not?" With a quick pull he had her on her feet; then seeing that her crown had rolled into a corner he quickly recovered it and held it out to her.

"I—I was sorta surprised when you came to life," he explained, with an embarrassed swallow. "I'm awfully sorry I let you fall—but I didn't know you were alive."

"Alive?" laughed the little Princess, setting the crown carelessly on the back of her head. "Am I were alive."

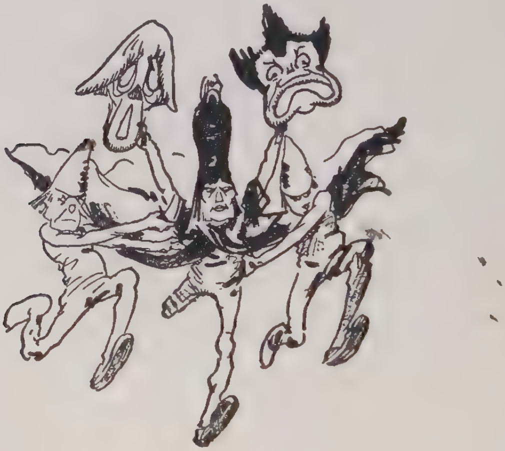
"Why—why—" stuttered Speedy, hardly knowing how to explain. "It's what you are now, seeing, thinking, feeling, being the same as I am."

"Oh!" The Princess looked at him thoughtfully. "Are you alive, too? Well, then I shan't mind it." Speedy nodded. Everything about this Princess was so strange and puzzling that he scarcely knew where to begin his questions. "Have you a name?" he asked finally. Seeing by her bewildered expression that she did not know, he dropped quickly to one knee, for he had suddenly remembered that statues often have their names stamped on the base. Sure enough, still visible on the silken hem of her dress were two words, "Princess Marygolden."

"Your name's Marygolden," announced Speedy, jumping up in great relief, "and now——" The Princess looked at him expectantly, but before he could finish his sentence there came a scraping of claws on the rocks outside and a great, green, scaly dragon hurled itself through the opening of the cave. Speedy, snatching his flashlight, clutched Marygolden and backed as far away as he could. The dragon, lifting his ugly head, moved it slowly from side to side and gave three furious sniffs that filled the air with smoke and sulphur. Then it was that Speedy saw it had no eyes. It was a groper, and could not see them at all. As the monster came toward them, the little boy flattened himself against the rock wall, and as soon as it was out of the mouth of the cave he rushed wildly through the opening, pulling the Princess along. Guided by the faint glow from his flashlight, he stumbled over rocks and ridges, sometimes escaping ghastly crevices and boiling springs by mere inches. Marygolden had changed all of his plans. It was all very well for a boy to go exploring through a lot of dungeony caverns, but for a Princess to be chased by deadly dragonish monsters was not the thing. So Speedy decided to return and throw himself on the mercy of the Shah. Perhaps the little sovereign could even explain the strange coming to life of the golden statue. He, himself, might, perhaps, be regarded as a hero and a rescuer and not thrown to the fire fish, after all. Marygolden, holding tightly to his hand, ran nearly as fast as he did, and in almost no time they had left the cavernous country behind and stopped to rest under a pink stone tree in the underwood.

"Is this—being—alive?" puffed the Princess, taking off her crown and using it for a fan.

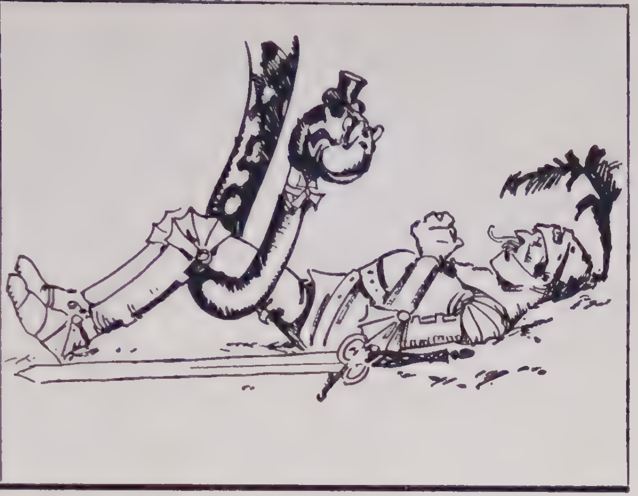
"Well," admitted Speedy judicially, "if we hadn't run like that the groper would have caught us and we wouldn't have been alive long after that. But we don't have to run all the time," he went on hastily. "Sometimes we walk, like this—see!" Taking her hand again, Speedy started slowly through the underwood. Marygolden fell in step quite easily, and looking up at his lovely companion Speedy smiled encouragingly. "She's older than I am but knows nothing at all," thought the boy complacently. "I'll just have to take care of her till something turns up." Something, as it happened, turned up very soon, for as Speedy and Marygolden entered the public square of Subterranea, a crowd of undergrounders, catching sight of them, forgot to whisper and burst into ear splitting shrieks and yells. Waving their arms and pointing accusingly at the Princess, they ran screaming for the Shah. Speedy looked nervously around for Zunda, who seemed to be the only friend he had. But instead of Zunda, the Shah himself, supported on each side by a slave, came panting on the scene. While the Subterraneans continued to shout with anger, the Shah snatched mask after mask from his attendants and held them up toward Speedy. The first was a growling lion, then came a fierce tiger, next a horribly scowling goblin, each mask growing more ferocious than the last. Con-



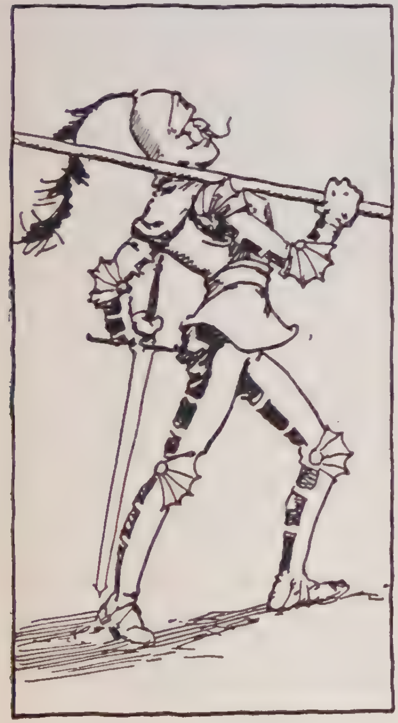
vinced that the Shah was frightfully displeased, Speedy tightened his hold on Marygolden, and making a dash for the Skyrocket jumped in; pulling the Princess after him, he slammed down the top. Marygolden, more interested than alarmed, pressed her pretty face against the window glass, but Speedy, as the undergrounders with bars and clubs fell upon the torpedo, began to feel terribly anxious. The Skyrocket could not withstand their blows forever and when it did give way what would happen to them? Staring around desperately his eye lighted on the lever that controlled the parashuter.

"But that goes down," groaned Speedy, "and gosh knows, we're down far enough now!" Then, remembering that the Skyrocket itself, while made to go up, had travelled quite successfully in the other direction, he pushed back his leather helmet and dropped to his knees. If he released the parashuter and pointed it up, why would it not carry them aloft through the shaft cut by the torpedo? Whether it would or not, it was their only chance, and pulling the lever Speedy released the strange apparatus, fastening one strap around Marygolden and one around himself. Then, clasping the hands of the little Princess around the handle, he pressed the button in the top, seized the handle himself, and with a violent effort pointed the parashuter straight up. The first pull of the lever had opened a trapdoor in the roof of the Skyrocket, and as the Subterraneans, with little shouts of triumph, swarmed around the opening, the parashuter burst out, scattering them in every direction. Safely it shot through the gash in the blue stone sky, but missing the tunnel cut by the Skyrocket, began tearing its own way through earth, rock, and sand. "It's a good thing we're tied on," thought Speedy, gritting his teeth. He tried to call something reassuring to Marygolden but the awful speed of the parashuter made that impossible, and not sure whether they would be crushed by falling rock or scalded by boiling lava, Speedy clung doggedly to the bone handle of Uncle Billy's remarkable umbrella.

SIR HOKUS MEETS AN OLD FRIEND



CHAPTER NINE



IT was a joy to be on firm land again, and after leaving Ploppa, Sir Hokus strode briskly across the yellow plain. At the first stream he stopped to wash the last of the swamp mud from his armor; then, throwing out his chest, he marched resolutely toward the strange, tall castle.

"Mayhap a true and Knightly adventure awaits me here," he mused, surveying through half closed eyes its glittering and distant spires. But the castle was a long way off, and thinking of this and that, but mostly of his queer encounter with the Marshlanders and the curious and kindly turtle, the Knight trudged cheerfully along, coming in the late afternoon to a little wood. Here he paused and sat down under a gnarled old tree to rest. Soothed by the rustle of the branches, he must have fallen asleep, for when he awakened it was almost dark and someone was shaking him violently. There was a strange hissing noise in his ears and a feeling of suffocation in his chest. Blinking both eyes rapidly, Sir Hokus, now thoroughly aroused, found himself suspended in the air, held in the smothering coils of a huge green serpent. And more alarming still, all around him were other serpents, twisting and writhing and thrusting out their ugly flat heads. The tree under which he had fallen asleep was a serpent tree; each branch growing out of the scarred, scaly trunk was a green and glistening snake.

Now Sir Hokus, in the course of his adventurous life, had been in many tight places, but this was quite the worst. With both arms pinioned to his sides he was powerless to draw his sword, and only his heavy armor saved him from being utterly crushed, or poisoned by the darting tongues of the unsightly monsters.

"There is but one thing to do, odds buttons! One thing!" he panted, trying in vain to free himself from the choking embrace, "and that, to perish manfully and unafraid!" So, with what breath he had left, the valiant Knight burst into a defiant battle song.

"What HO! 'Tis the challenge of good Knights and true,
What HO! For the swords and the daggers!
The lances that clash, the good steeds that crash,
The tilting and jousting that staggers!

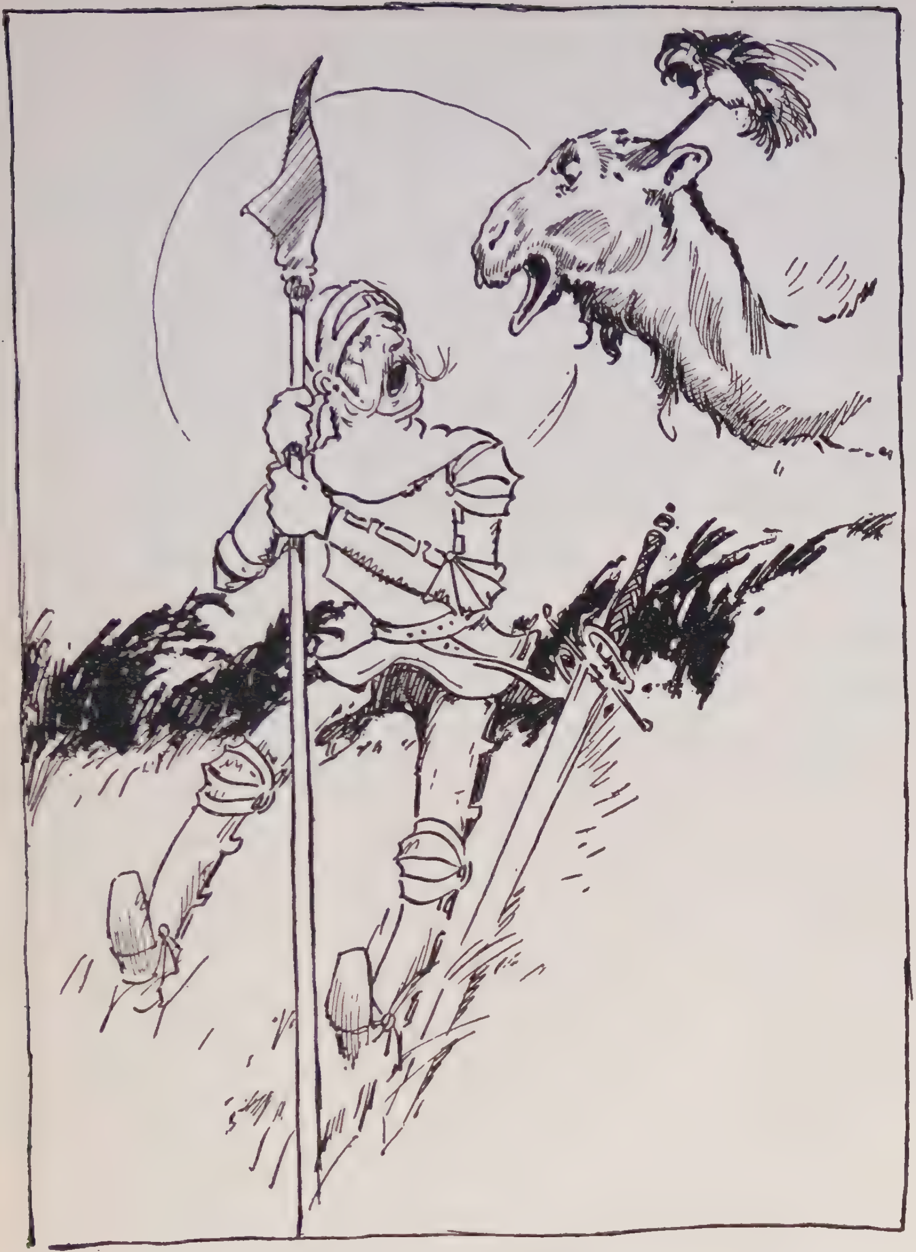
"What HO! 'Tis the challenge all good Knights must heed,
What HO! 'Tis the call of defiance,
In the furious fray
Ye shall perish this day
All ye despots, ye dragons, ye giants!"

To the first verse of this song the serpents paid small attention, but at the second, every snakish branch began to sway and swing in rhythm. At the third line, the serpent encircling Sir Hokus started to unwind, moving in perfect time with the others. As the Knight felt the loosening of the coils around his waist, he gave a joyous shout; then, seeing the effect his song was having, he bawled as loud as he could. With closed eyes the snakes now waved and rippled in time to the music, and as he reached the last note of his war cry the one holding him straightened out with a rapturous hiss and Sir Hokus fell crashing to earth. He lost no time in rolling out of the tree's reach, and for some moments lay panting and exhausted on the ground, while the snake tree, suddenly deprived of its victim and no longer under the spell of the song, began to snap, rattle, and hiss with fury. But Sir Hokus did not even open his eyes.

Now, as it happened, the serpents were not the only ones who had heard the good Knight's singing. Plodding wearily along through the dust, another creature pricked up its ears as the booming notes rang through the wood. Then, gathering up its long legs and hunching along in great, awkward leaps, it ran straight toward the singer, so that by the time Sir Hokus had struggled to a sitting position it had reached him, and falling upon its knees, licked him frantically through the bars of his helmet.

"Hokus, my dear discoverer, there you are, there you are at last!" it gulped happily. "I had almost given up the search when I heard that grand old song."

"Camy! By the beard of my father's goat, 'tis



" 'TIS CAMY HIMSELF"

Camy himself!" And sitting up joyfully Sir Hokus gave the Comfortable Camel a resounding and affectionate thwack on the hump. Then, as the Camel, backing off to have a better look at him, drew near the darting branches of the serpent tree, he seized its bridle and jerked his thumb warningly in the tree's direction. Camy looked inquiringly over his shoulder, then gave a terrified bleat.

"For pity sakes, for pity snakes," he squealed, sitting down with a thump. "What's this? What's this?"

"A good thing to keep away from," rumbled the Knight, "though I'm minded to cut off every single branch to pay for the squeezing I've suffered."

"Squeezing!" coughed the Camel, rolling its eyes wildly. "Oh, my dear Hokus, what have you escaped? But I beg of you not to cut off those serpents. How uncomfortable it would be if they were all loose and free to chase us through the wood!"

"Methinks you're right!" sighed Sir Hokus, regretfully returning his sword to its scabbard. "But let us be gone and away from this accursed spot." Seizing hold of its bridle, he pulled himself erect, and walking slowly at the creature's head related all that had befallen him since he left the Emerald City.

Chapter Nine

Then the Comfortable Camel told how it had followed him on the very night of his departure.

"Fortunately I had on my trappings and saddle sacks," it confided, with a satisfied sniff, "and spoke to no one of my purpose, for I knew you'd not want the whole menagerie after you. But I did think you should have something comfortable to ride." Looking up at the tossing seat on the Camel's back, Sir Hokus sighed resignedly. Camel riding was not his idea of comfort, but he would not hurt the faithful creature's feelings by saying so.

"Did you come through the swamp?" he asked curiously.

"Went around," explained the Camel shortly, "and thought I'd lost you till I heard that old song."

"Well, 'twas like to have been my last," admitted Sir Hokus, with a grave shake of his head, "but tell me, how goes it at the capital?"

"They were still preparing for your quest when I left," chuckled the Camel comfortably, "and probably haven't missed you, even yet. By the way, where are we bound?"

" 'Tis too dark to see, but on the other side of this wood stands a splendid, tall castle. Methinks there I shall find a proper adventure."

"Then," decided the Comfortable Camel firmly, "we shall require rest. Let us camp in this field for the night and pursue our journey in the morning." They had, by this time, come safely out of the wood, and all the other trees being of a usual and harmless nature, had experienced no further difficulties.

"In my right hand saddle sack you will find a tent," announced the Comfortable Camel quietly, "a tent, shawls, and other comforts."

"Hast, perchance, a sandwich or goodly tart?" inquired the Knight, rummaging eagerly in the huge baskets that hung from the Camel's hump.

"I came just as I was," answered Camy regretfully. "I was afraid if I stopped for supplies someone might suspect and follow me."

"Ah, well," said Sir Hokus, pulling out the tent, "an adventurer must endure some hardships. Perchance a great feast awaits us in yonder hall!"

"Perchance," yawned the Camel, kneeling awkwardly upon the ground and disposing himself for the night. It did not take Sir Hokus long to put up the tent, an embroidered, silken affair with a collapsible bamboo pole. Spreading some thick shawls on the ground and a pillow for his head, the

Knight removed his armor, and being exceedingly weary after the adventures of the day, soon fell asleep. He dreamed he was in a splendid ship, sailing into the harbor of a crystal city. A golden-haired Princess waved to him from a crystal tower, and leaning over the rail of the ship to wave back, Sir Hokus bumped his head on his sword and awoke. Awoke to find himself really sailing, sailing through the air, the tent top snapping and flapping in the breezes.

"How, now! And what means this?" gasped the Knight, jumping up in alarm. A look through the tent flap was more astonishing still. There was Camy snoring calmly beside the tent; there was the tulip tree he remembered seeing before he retired—there, I say, was the field itself, but not resting on the solid ground. No, odds whirligigs and kite tails! 'Twas flying, flying like a magic carpet through the night. The stars twinkled up above, the lights from little towns and villages twinkled down below, and Sir Hokus, frantically clasping on his armor, thumped the Comfortable Camel hard upon the head.

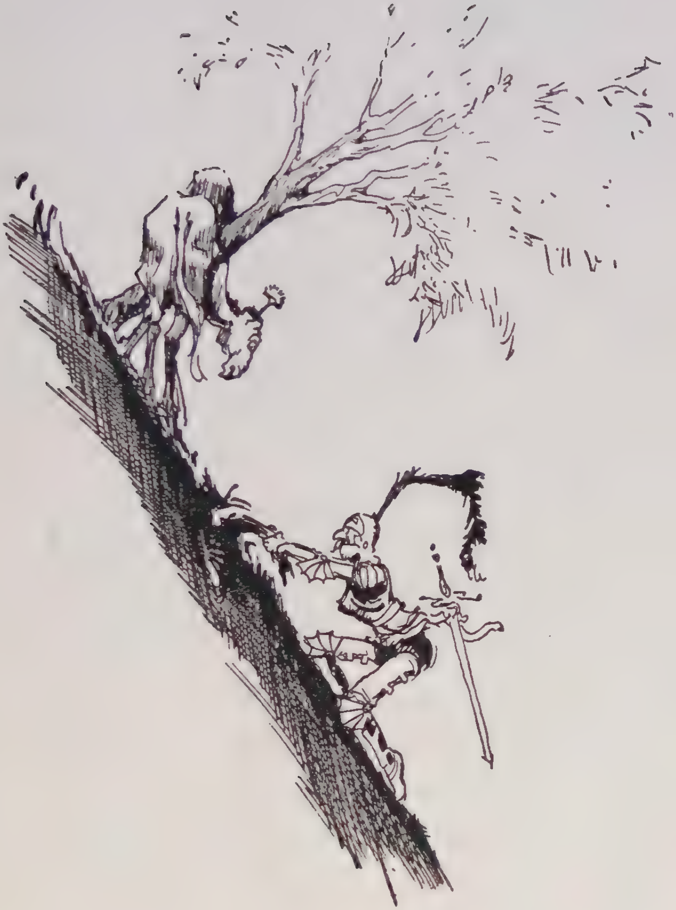
"What's up?" inquired the Camel, opening one eye and yawning tremendously. "What's up?"

"Why *we* are!" exclaimed Sir Hokus, with an excited flourish of his sword. "Up and away through the sky and flying Oz knows where!" Opening the other eye, the Camel lurched unsteadily to its feet.

"But we're—quite—comfortable——" he muttered uneasily, "and — so — far — quite — safe. It must be one of those flying fields Peter was telling us about." Now Peter, as many of you know, is a little Philadelphia boy who has visited Oz and spent many adventurous days with the celebrities.

"Oh, no, no, no!" said Sir Hokus, shaking his head positively. "Flying fields in America are not like this at all. Flying fields in America stand still and the airplanes do the flying and come to rest on the fields. But this field—this field is flying itself. Why, it may even carry us out of Oz!"

"Shall—shall we jump?" quavered the Comfortable Camel, bobbing his head nervously. Then, as Sir Hokus walked to the edge of the flying field and looked over, he gave a frightened scream. "Take care! Take care, or you'll tumble off and break yourself!" he called anxiously, and seizing the Knight by the mail shirt-tail dragged him determinedly away. It was nearly a mile to the ground, and sitting down on a big rock in the center of the field Sir Hokus stared dizzily at the clouds whirling by, and at the stars shining unconcernedly over their heads.

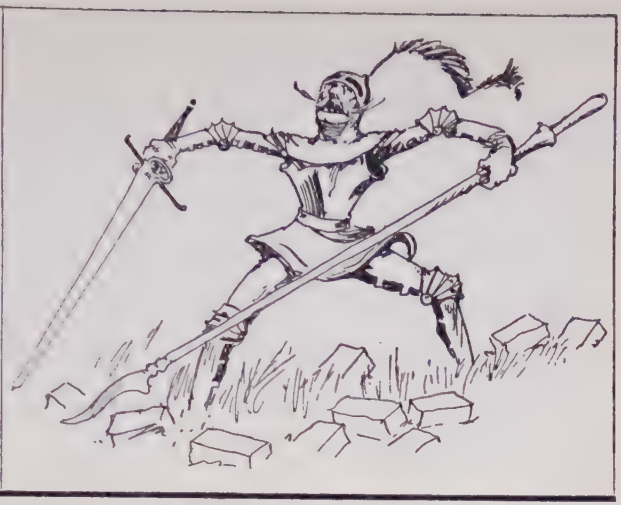


THE FLYING FIELD TILTED SIDEWAYS

"At this rate, we'll be at the end of nowhere before we can stop ourselves," groaned the Knight despondently. "Every time I fall asleep a disaster overtakes me."

"Disaster goes very fast," shuddered the Comfortable Camel, pressing as close to Sir Hokus as he could, and for almost an hour they huddled together as the field flew on and on over the hills and forests of Oz. One by one the stars faded out and the first rosy streaks of morning began to tinge the sky. Then, as the sun came up, the flying field came down, swooping toward the earth with such speed and suddenness that Sir Hokus was hurled off the rock and only saved himself by seizing hold of a furze bush. The Comfortable Camel, flung against a tree, was kept from falling in the same manner. But when it had almost reached the ground, the flying field tilted sideways into a perfect precipice, and Sir Hokus and the Camel rolled like cannon balls to the bottom, the tent coming down hard upon their heads so that they did not see the field straighten up and fly carelessly off without them.

THE DESERTED CITY



CHAPTER TEN

UNTANGLING himself from the tent folds, Sir Hokus sprang to his feet and looked eagerly around him. They had tumbled into the courtyard of a tall, strange castle of gold, but grass grew a foot high between the gold bricks in the court, the windows of the castle were all broken, and birds flew twittering in and out, while the castle itself was almost buried under a waving mass of vines. As Sir Hokus, pushing back his helmet, squinted uneasily upward, three page boys, just visible on the tallest tower, lifted their arms and blew three long, shrill blasts upon their trumpets. As the clear silvery notes, leaving a hundred rippling echoes in the still, morning air, finally died away, the pages let their arms drop stiffly at their sides and stood as rigid as statues, which was not surprising because they were statues—statues of pure gold.

"Camy! Camy!" wheezed the Knight, dragging the rest of the tent off the Comfortable Camel. "Dids't hear yon curious clamor?"

"Well," mumbled the Camel, heaving himself upward with a great creaking of harness and saddlery, "I heard something. Maybe it's the call to breakfast," he continued, sniffing the air hopefully. Then, as he took in the perfectly deserted courtyard and forsaken castle, his eyes bulged with disappointment and dismay. "Who blew?" he wheezed hoarsely. Without speaking, Sir Hokus waved his sword at the golden statues. "No!" murmured the Camel, flattening back his ears and wriggling his nose very fast. "Great grandmothers! In a mere moment the inhabitants may fall upon us with swords, spears, and daggers!"

"Methinks," sighed Sir Hokus, walking slowly toward the castle, "methinks we'll find here neither friend nor foe. What ho! What ho, within!" he called loudly, but only his own voice came echoing sadly back to him, so pushing open the gold studded door he stepped cautiously inside, the Camel treading timidly at his heels. But though they walked through all the grand rooms, upstairs and down, they found no one. The furniture, being solid gold, had happily withstood the ravages of time, but the curtains and tapestries had crumbled to powder, and the dust blown in through the windows lay so thickly on the floors and sills that flowers had taken root there and grew as luxuriously inside as out. Rabbits and other small forest creatures peered out anxiously as the Knight and his Camel went thumping through the halls. Sir Hokus tried to extract some information about the former owner of the castle from a tiny fawn he cornered in the dining hall, but if the little fellow could talk he did not choose to, and with one bound leapt out of the window.

"Some mighty monarch, mayhap, lived here," mused the Knight, leaning thoughtfully against the great mantel, while the Comfortable Camel nibbled the top of a young tree that had grown up in the fireplace. "But what boots it? He is not here now. What a curious quest this is turning out to be, Camy. I seek a maiden to rescue and find a swamp witch determined to marry; I seek a monster to slay and am seized by a snake tree; I search for a monarch to serve and find only his empty castle."

"Yes, but wouldn't you call the way we reached this castle an adventure?" observed the Camel, speaking a bit indistinctly because his mouth was full of leaves. "Not many have travelled on a flying field, Hokus, and there may be a dragon lurking in these very forests, for all we know."

"A dragon! Odds thumpenny! Why, so there may! I'll slay me a dragon yet! How you comfort me, Camy. And perchance I'll find a breakfast, too." Completely cheered, Sir Hokus strode briskly toward the door and down the golden steps.

"Which would you rather find first," inquired the Camel, ambling slowly after him, "the breakfast, or the dragon?"

"The dragon," answered the Knight promptly. "One can eat any time, but to slay a dragon!—Ah! how that would refresh me!"

"These leaves refresh me more," said the Camel calmly. "Too bad you cannot enjoy some of these nice, tender twigs." Sir Hokus nodded absently.

" 'Tis strange, most strange, about yon trumpets," he mused, looking thoughtfully back at the deserted castle.

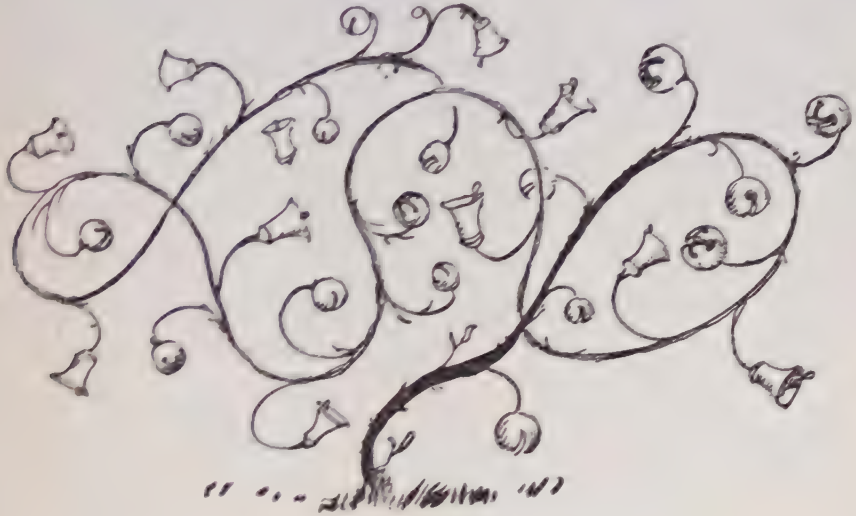
"Everything's strange," admitted the Camel readily, "but that's what we're seeking, isn't it? Perhaps those trumpets go off like the burglar alarms in our castle at home when strangers tread in the courtyard."

"But there's no electricity here," objected the Knight. "This castle is centuries old, Camy, and so is this city."

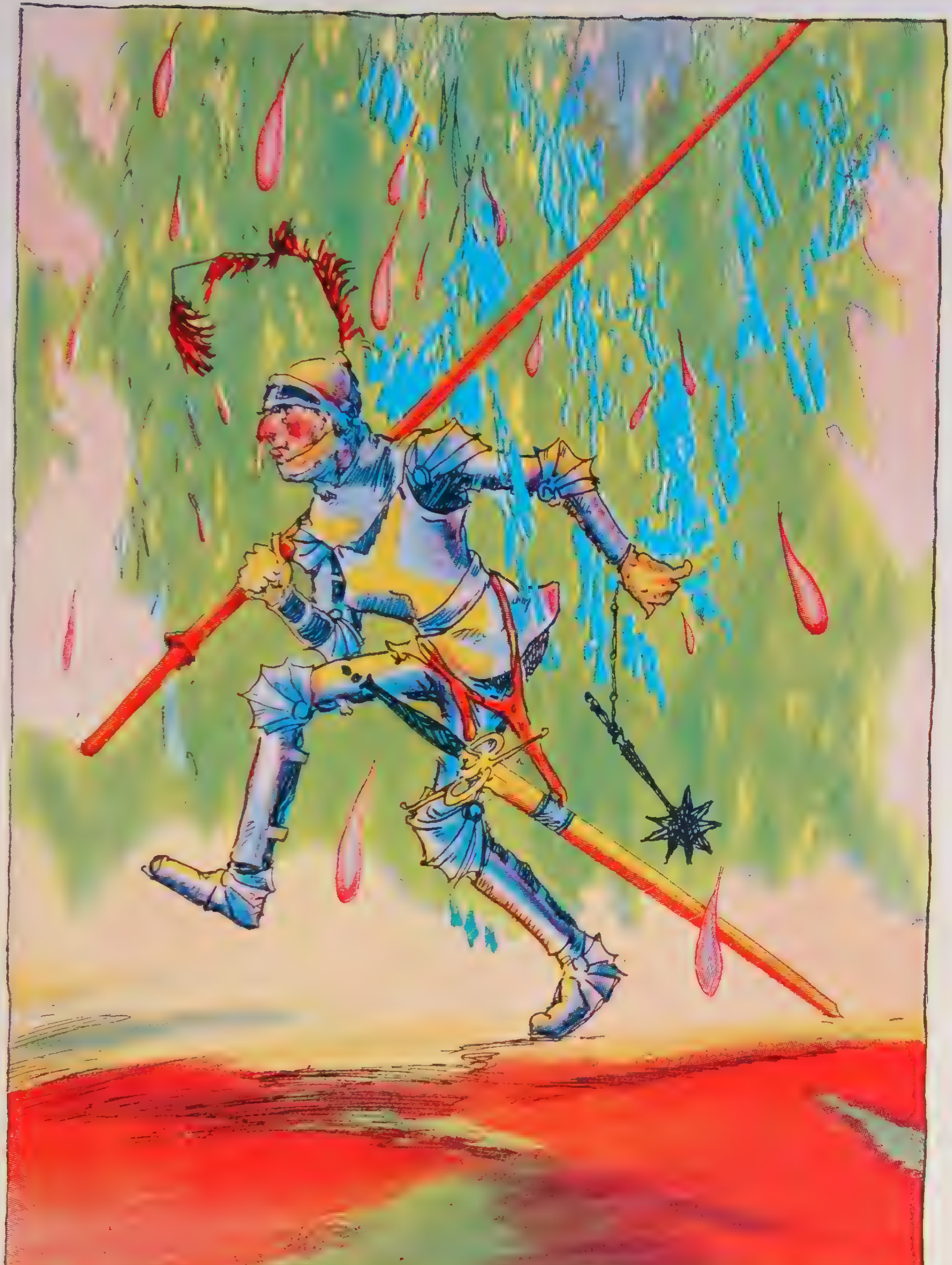
"And so is this forest!" exclaimed the Camel, peering uncertainly into the tangle of vines and trees ahead. "Shall we go on?"

"Most certainly. Hast forgotten the dragon?" Rushing ahead, Sir Hokus forced his way between two giant oaks, and stepped into a great, rustling, green forest. Moving cautiously between the mighty trees, many times having to slash a path for the Camel and himself with his sword, Sir Hokus looked sharply about for signs of a dragon or a breakfast. But after an hour's tramp he had found neither, and weary and somewhat downhearted seated himself beside a silvery forest stream and tried to forget how ravenously hungry he was. Camy, after quenching his thirst and storing up a vast quantity of water for future use, knelt down beside the Knight and was soon asleep. Sir Hokus, sitting with his back against the smooth trunk of a lyre bush, was presently aware of faint music, strange old tunes he had not heard since he was a boy, seven centuries ago. He jumped up, and parting the branches of the bush looked all around for signs of the singer, but could see no one. But as soon as he sat down the music began anew. It seemed to come from the bush itself. "Odds pasties! I'm dreaming!" muttered the Knight, starting to walk briskly up and down the banks of the little river. "There's no one here to sing!" Great green willows dropped their branches into the stream, and as Sir Hokus paused under one of the largest and loveliest, the willow began to weep in real earnest and big tears splashed down upon the Knight's armor. Its long feathery arms touched him on the cheek and rested gently on his shoulders, and Sir Hokus could have sworn he heard a voice sorrowfully calling him.

"'Tis hunger that makes me imagine all this!" puffed the Knight, uneasily wiping away the tears. "When the stomach is empty the head is full of fancies." But the tears were certainly real tears, and extremely upset and puzzled, Sir Hokus started back toward the Comfortable Camel. Several horse chestnuts, as he passed under their branches, shook themselves violently so that a shower of chestnut burrs pattered down upon him, almost, thought Sir Hokus, as if they were trying to attract his attention. Leaning against the Comfortable Camel, the Knight mopped his brow, and turning his back upon the willows fixed his gaze upon a gaudy vine that clambered riotously over a dead tree. It was covered with bell-like flowers that rang and jingled pleasantly in the wind. Birds, after resting among its pink blossoms, began immediately to laugh, chatter, and fairly rock



with merriment. "Funny!" thought Sir Hokus as two crows, alighting on the vine, burst into loud haw haws and then flew screaming away over the tree tops. "I'm feverish!" panted the Knight, feeling his pulse anxiously. "Odds goblets, I've heard crows caw but never haw before. I'm feverish and starving by inches." Falling upon the Comfortable Camel's saddle sacks he began burrowing wildly among their contents in search of a stray cracker or jar of jam left from some palace picnic. It seemed to the Knight that the birds perched upon the gay vine laughed more hilariously than ever as he rummaged through the great basket-like containers, almost as if they were making fun of him, but the Comfortable Camel never awakened at all, snoring peacefully through the whole performance. There was nothing eatable in the right hand saddle sack, and Sir Hokus, after emptying the left, had about given up in disgust, when he discovered a tiny catch, and turning the catch found a hidden compartment in the bottom of the sack. In this compartment were two fat packages wrapped in silver paper. Sir Hokus had the cover off the first in no time. Inside lay six large, fat figs, and without delay he popped one into his mouth, then another, and another, and another, till the whole six were gone. Feeling a little



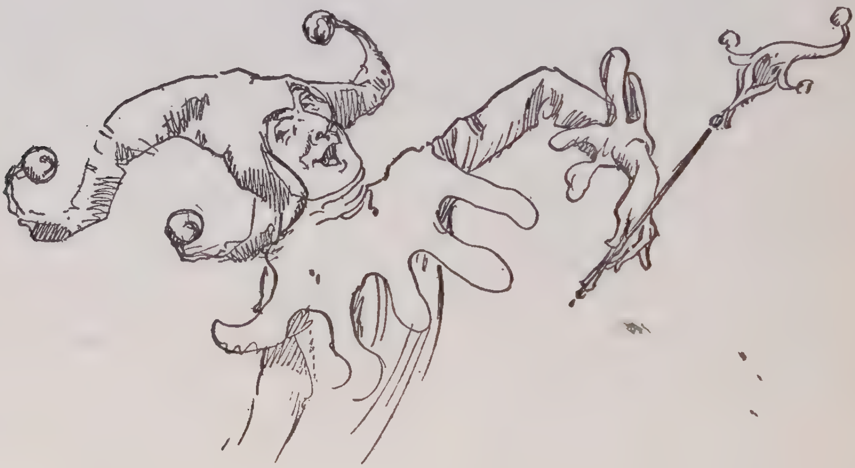
THE WILLOW BEGAN TO WEEP IN REAL EARNEST -*Chapter 10*

better, but far from satisfied, he now opened the second package. This contained six large dates, and settling back with a contented sigh the famished Knight tried one of the dates. Both figs and dates were dry and hard and had evidently lain in the sack for a long, long time, but to Sir Hokus they tasted perfectly delicious. A company of jays were now swinging on the vine and laughed so saucily at the Knight that when he finished the date he sent the date seed spinning into their midst. With little shrieks and chatters, the jays flew into the air, but the vine—swords and swordfish!—the vine gave itself a brisk shake that set all the pink bell-flowers ringing merrily, and then slowly began to unwind. Now it twisted and whirled and spun till Sir Hokus could see nothing but a flying blur of pink and green. Dropping the package of dates, he rubbed his eyes and stared again to make sure he had seen aright, and as he did so the whirling ceased, and where the vine had been stood a mirthful and care free person in a belled cap. He seemed as puzzled as Sir Hokus and after blinking at him a moment in silence, remarked in a confidential aside to himself:

"A Knight, a Knight, as I live! So I am to begin the day with night—
The day is young, the Knight is old; now is he brave, and is he bold?"

"Never mind that!" blustered Sir Hokus, hopping up in great excitement. "Who are you and how came you here?"

"Can't you guess?" With a delighted bounce, the fellow shook his belled stick:



"I'm just a jester gesturing
To keep the company gay,
I'm just a jester gesturing
My whole long life away!

"As a matter of fact," he continued, sobering down suddenly, "I think I've been enchanted. I seem to have been a funnysuckle vine and my head's still full of twits and twitters. Even as a funnysuckle vine

I still could be gay. Did you hear the birds laughing at my riddles?"

"So that's what made them laugh!" roared Sir Hokus, slapping his knee and then rubbing the side of his hand where the armor had bruised it. "A funny-suckle vine, and when I flung the date seed you became——"

"Myself!" announced the jester, with a sweeping bow. "And as my beneficent restorer, I thank you upon bended knee."

"Go to, now! Go to!" puffed the Knight, pulling the fellow to his feet. "And a bother on this bended knee stuff. Cans't tell me aught of yon golden castle?"

"Castle?" murmured the jester, shaking his head with a puzzled frown. "Castle? I remember no castle!"

"But you must have lived in a castle," insisted Sir Hokus, "and if you were enchanted, so must the others have been. What country is this, and what King did you serve?"

"King? Country? Faith, and I remember nothing! Nothing!" Shaking his head again until all the bells on his cap tinkled, the jester looked uneasily at the Knight. "I've been a vine so long I guess I'm still twisted," he admitted regretfully. "But come, there are other Kings, and other castles; the sun shines and the sky is blue. Let us forget the past and address ourselves to the future. You, being a Knight, must serve some King. Let me go back to his court with you!"

"I serve Queen Ozma of Oz, but I am now bound upon a quest to render assistance to a maiden, slay a monster, or serve a monarch."

"Maidens, monsters, monarchs," chanted the jester, counting them off on his fingers, "how I dote upon all three. I, too, will go upon this quest and make the going merry, be assured of that; most merry." Turning a somersault, the jester winked mischievously at Sir Hokus, but the Knight, with a little frown, was looking for the package of dates. Some mysterious power was in that date seed and if one enchantment had been broken, so reasoned Sir Hokus, might not others be dispelled? Why, he might even discover the King of the Golden Castle! But though he kicked aside the leaves and went carefully over every inch of ground where he had been sitting, and where the funnysuckle vine had been, there was not a trace of the dates anywhere. The jester, meanwhile, delighted to find himself alive, skipped and danced from tree to tree, seeming to care nothing for his former life or master, and when, with a sigh, Sir Hokus finally gave up searching for the dates, he tugged him impatiently by the arm.

"Let us be off and be gone," he begged earnestly. "This forest is enchanted and if we tarry here we may be caught in some evil spell. To horse! To horse, good Knight! Let us be away and seek our fortunes elsewhere!" Then, his eye falling for the first time upon the sleeping Camel, he gave a great bounce and burst into such a roar of laughter that Camy awoke with a startled grunt of surprise. "Since when!" shrieked the jester, holding both his sides. "Since when have Knights ridden camels?" Without bothering to explain, Sir Hokus hurried over to the Comfortable Camel and quickly told him all that had happened. The Camel, after an amazed glance at the jester, lurched hurriedly to his feet.

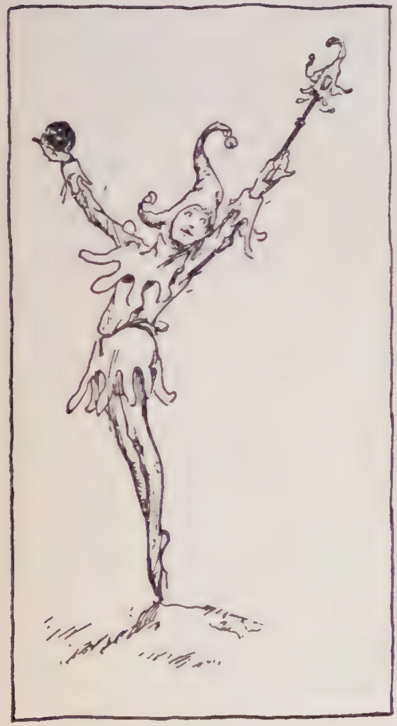
"The fellow is right," he snorted anxiously. "This forest is bewitched; let us get off before we take root and turn into turnips."

"Many happy returnips!" chuckled the jester, jumping over a tree stump. "To camel! To camel, good Knight! Will you never be moving? Come on, Comical," he roared, snatching the Camel's bridle and giving it a playful twist.

"Mind what you're about," said Sir Hokus in a vexed voice, for he was not going to have Camy insulted. Then, as the strange murmuring of the forest was beginning to oppress him terribly, he started to walk rapidly along the banks of the little stream, for this, he felt, would sooner or later lead them out into the open.

THE KNIGHT LOSES HIS CAMEL

CHAPTER ELEVEN



THEY had gone but a few yards when the jester, capering along ahead, turned round and leapt three times into the air.

"Stop!" he called imperiously. "Stop! I've just remembered something."

"How now, and what is it?" demanded the Knight, rushing forward impetuously and hoping it would be something about the golden castle and its owner.

"My name!" exulted the jester, tossing his cap into the air and catching it on his belled stick. "My name is Peter Pun."

"Oh bother your name," fumed Sir Hokus in a disappointed voice. "That's not important."

"Well, it's important to me," insisted the jester, hopping across the stream and back for pure joy:

"Peter Pun gives everyone
A taste of jollity and fun."

"I'd rather have a taste of biscuit, or bacon and eggs," sighed the Knight. "Six figs and one date make a poor enough breakfast for a fighting man."

"Date!" chattered the Comfortable Camel, taking several quick steps and resting his head on the Knight's shoulder. "Do you realize you've eaten a magic date, Hokus, and may turn into something else any minute?"

"He's turning! He's turning!" yelled Peter Pun, pointing his finger warningly.

"Turning!" groaned Sir Hokus, clapping his hand to his forehead.

"Turning round," laughed Peter, hopping behind a tree to escape the Knight's long arm.

"You're a fool," hissed the Camel angrily. "Can't you understand that this is serious?"

"How can a fool be serious?" inquired Peter, tickling the Camel on the nose with a long branch.

"There's really no harm in him," whispered Sir Hokus in Camy's ear. "And methinks all the magic in the date rested in the seed I flung at the funny-suckle vine."

"Methinks you're right, Good Knight! Good Knight!
We'll solve the riddle later;
At any rate, you ate the date,
And now are full of dayter!"

"Data," corrected Sir Hokus. "Odds pasties, I would I had the rest of that package!"

"Well I don't," said the Comfortable Camel, compressing his lips severely. "We've trouble enough with this one fellow without disenchanting any more. Much better to have left him a vine. Can't you walk along sensibly and stop climbing every tree you come to?" he snorted fretfully, as Peter swung along from branch to branch more like a monkey than a person.

"If you'd been a vine as long as I, you'd climb trees too," laughed Peter, dropping lightly on the Camel's hump. "I keep thinking I'm a vine," he murmured dreamily, winding both arms around the Comfortable Camel's neck and hugging him vigorously. "And how I do dote on you, old potato!"

"There! There!" cautioned the Camel. "Don't choke me to death." In spite of his sauciness, there was something so lovable about the little jester that Camy did not mind the embrace nearly as much as he pretended. "Get back in the saddle," he grunted gruffly, "and see if you can't keep quiet for five minutes. It's so much more comfortable keeping quiet."

"Who wants to be comfortable?" sniffed Peter, standing on his head in the middle of the high seat. "Who wants to be comfortable? I'd rather be gay! Say:

"A company of four tried to walk through a door,
But the door slammed them all on the nose.
Can you tell me just why? Or at least have a try?
It's easier than you'd suppose!"

"Was it a true door?" asked the Knight, who was foolishly fond of riddles.

"As true a door as you'd find anywhere in your travels," admitted Peter, settling down cozily in the seat on the Camel's hump.

"I don't see how it could slam anyone on the nose unless there was someone back of it," put in the Comfortable Camel, pulling a long wisp from an overhanging vine and munching it thoughtfully.

"Nor do I," agreed the Knight. "Come now, what kind of door was it, Peter?"

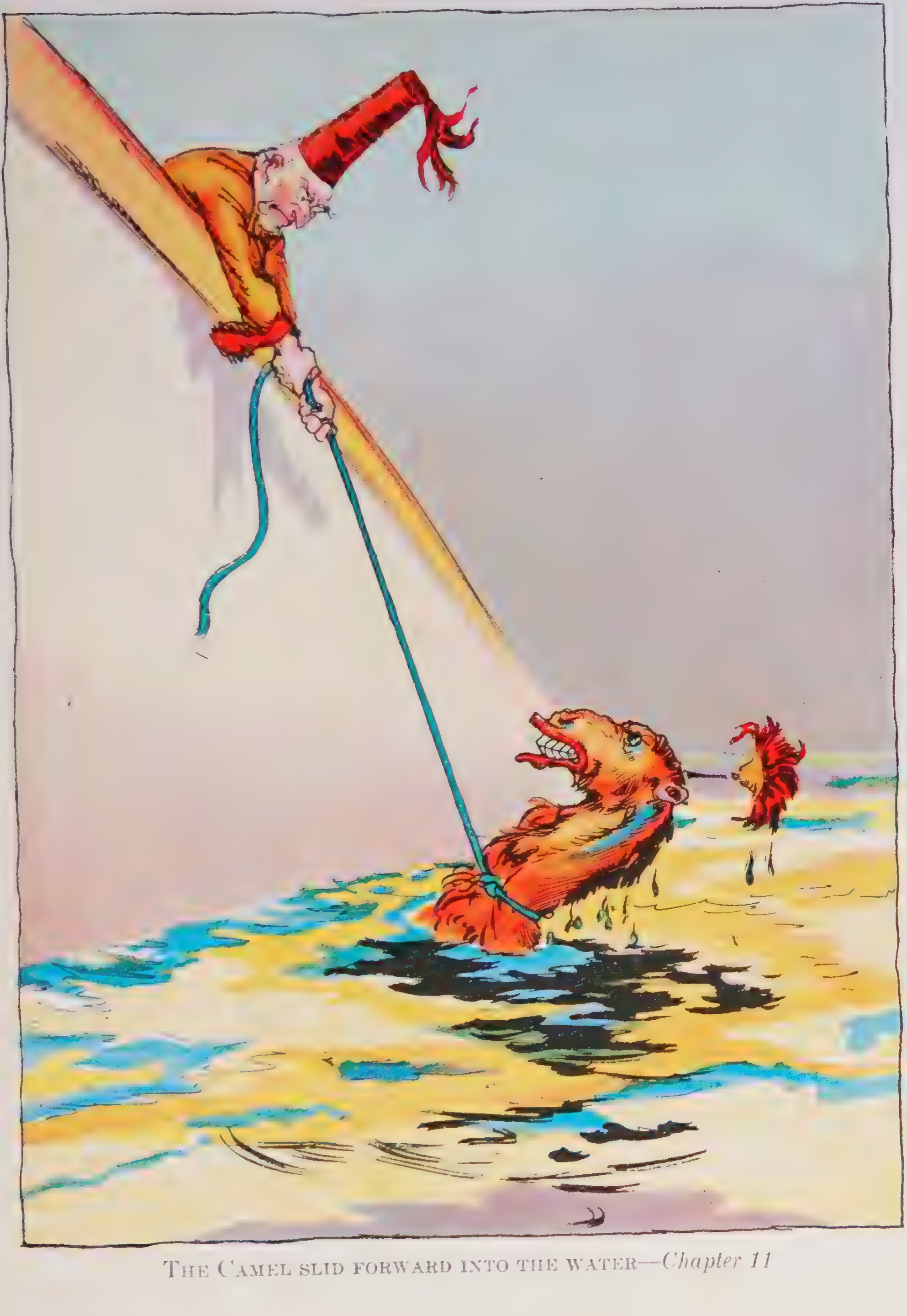
"A troubadour!" sang out the jester, kicking up his heels. "And if you were a troubadour, and four tried to walk through you, would you not slam them on the nose?"

"Humph!" grunted Sir Hokus, striding ahead to hide his grin. "One more pun and there'll be a slam on your own nose, odds buttons! A slam and some more things, too!"

"Best save your slams for the monster," yawned Peter, curling up comfortably and pretending to snore. "Heigho, what's that?" Leaping to his feet, he held his hand to his ear. "Methinks I hear a monster now!" Sir Hokus had already stopped and was listening intently. The dip and splash of some great creature churning its way through the water came to them quite distinctly, and as they all peered curiously ahead, it swept round a bend in the stream and bore straight down upon them. Sir Hokus, who had expected to see a ferocious river beast, let his sword fall in bitter disappointment. It was no monster after all, but a boat, a boat rowed by twenty strong slaves, its yellow sails flapping jauntily in the breeze.

As the Knight continued to gaze gloomily at the curious craft, a huge fat person heaved himself out of a chair on deck, and after one long look at the Comfortable Camel began barking out orders and directions so fast that the three watchers on the bank could understand nothing of what he said. But the slaves apparently did, for dropping their oars they seized a long, thick rope, and before Sir Hokus had time even to blink, it whirled through the air and settled with a vicious hiss around Camy's long neck. With a choked gurgle the poor Camel slid forward into the water so quickly that Peter circled into the air and fell flat upon the mossy river bank.

"Halt! Yield! What dost thou there?" Brandishing his battle-axe, Sir Hokus scrambled to the edge of the stream in a vain effort to seize hold of the Comfortable Camel or slash the rope that was hauling him away, before it was too late. But it was already too late, and the Knight, slipping into deep water, was forced to watch his old friend dragged ignominiously off by the neck. The slaves, urged on by Tuzzle—for of course it was the very Grand Vizier—were rowing like mad, and Sir Hokus in his heavy armor had no chance at all to swim after them. Indeed, had not Peter jumped up in the nick of time and held out a



The Camel slid forward into the water—*Chapter 11*

stout branch, Sir Hokus would have sunk like a stone to the bottom of the stream. Peter, somewhat sobered by the unexpected capture of the Camel, helped the Knight to a nearby tree stump. Hurriedly emptying the water from his helmet and boots, Sir Hokus made ready to pursue the yellow boat.

"Had this been a land battle 'twould not have gone so easy with them," rumbled the Knight, snatching the long slippery stem of a water lily from around his neck.

"Well, they'll land sooner or later and then we can give them what for and what ho! Come on!" cried the jester, dancing with impatience. "If we follow this river we're bound to catch them. Are we going to let those old camelnappers steal our good steed?"

"No, odds thumpeny! A thousand times, no!" roared Sir Hokus, and catching up his battle-axe he began running along the edge of the yellow river. But twenty pair of arms are stronger than two pair of legs, and in less than three minutes the royal barge of the Sultan was out of sight. As the Knight and Peter raced along, the river grew broader and more turbulent. The forest, too, thinned out, and after a stiff twenty minute sprint the two rescuers found themselves in open country. Pausing a moment to catch his breath, Sir Hokus squinted inquiringly around. A luxurious orange grove lay ahead of them, but the river branched sharply in two directions. Refreshing himself with an orange and throwing one to Peter, the Knight paused to reflect.

"Toss up your sword," advised the jester. "If the hilt comes down first, we'll follow the left branch; if it comes down point first, we'll take the right!" It seemed as good a way as any to choose, and when the gleaming sword fell point first at the Knight's feet, they both felt relieved.

"When the sword point points the way,
Truly one can't go astray!"

chanted Peter Pun.

"And that fat rascal shall have the sword point where it will do him no good," promised Sir Hokus, striding fiercely along the right bank of the stream. "Dost see a sail, Peter?"

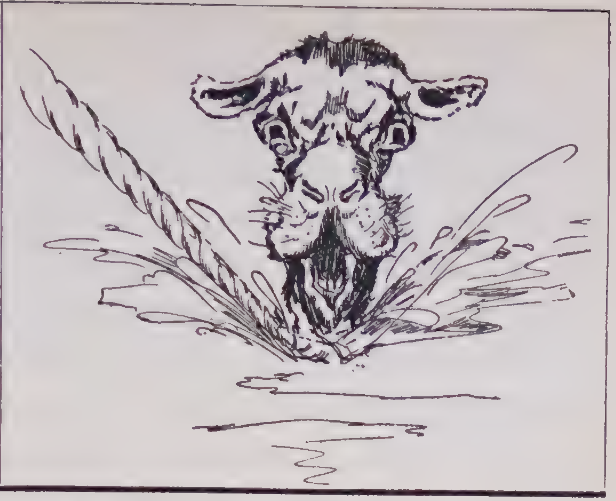
"Neither a sail nor a camel's tail," admitted the jester, shaking his head regretfully:

"But round that turn ahead, who knows?
We'll find alike our friend and foes!"

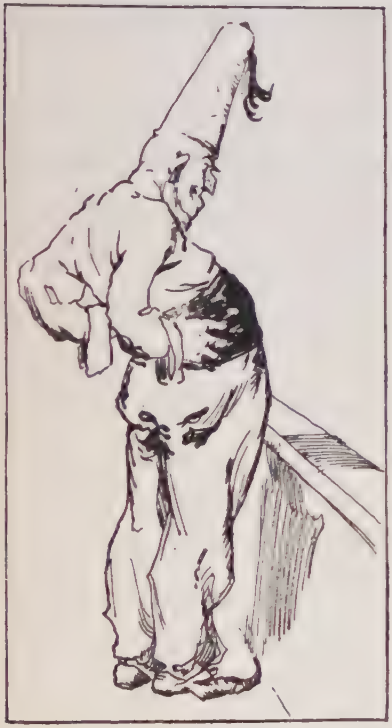
"Then come on!" breathed the Knight, breaking into a run. "Come along with you!"

"Coming!" piped Peter, his mouth full of oranges.

CAMY AT THE SULTAN'S COURT



CHAPTER TWELVE



NOW the Comfortable Camel, though nearly choked and almost drowned, had instantly recognized Tuzzle. Like a bad and half remembered dream, his former life in Samandra came back to him. The long, tiresome journeys across the desert, the bad temper of the Sultan, the heavy loads he was forced to carry in order that his peppery little master might travel in comfort and luxury. He opened his mouth to cry out, but found to his horror that he could not speak a word. Instead of indignant protests against his captors, he was uttering only camelish grunts and gurgles, and when three minnows swam down his throat he gave up in despair, and closing his eyes and his mouth allowed himself to be towed along in silence. In Samandra, he recalled bitterly, he had not been able to converse at all. How dreadful to be but a dumb beast of burden after his interesting and cozy existence in the Emerald City of Oz. It was not to be thought of or endured.

"I'll run away first chance I have, and let them try to stop me if they dare," he decided grimly, beginning to work his feet to keep the rope round his neck from strangling him. Tuzzle, meanwhile, leaning proudly over the rail, was already counting up the rewards he might claim for his cleverness in capturing the Camel. Rubbing his hands with anticipation, he bade the slaves row faster. This they did, and in less than an hour the Royal Sampan drew alongside the golden dock in the Sultan's city. The Sultan, warned of their arrival by watchers he had stationed along the bank, came hurrying down from the palace, followed closely by the Grand Bozzywoz and other dignitaries.

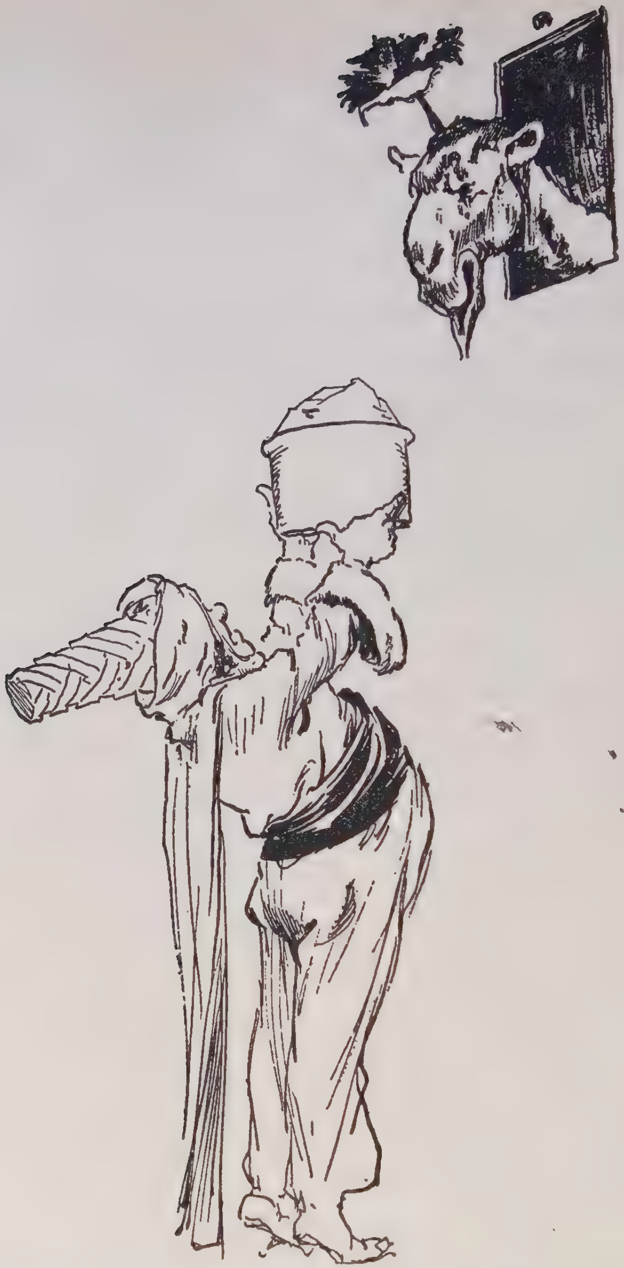
Chapter Twelve

"Am I a good Seer, or am I not?" queried Chinda, waving complacently at the Camel swimming feebly after the yellow barge. "Behold your Majesty's Comfortable Camel!"

"It certainly does not appear to be very comfortable at the present moment," observed the Keeper of the Royal Records. "A most uncomfortable camel I should call it."

"Hold your tongue," advised the Sultan disagreeably, and after a quick glance to assure himself that the Camel's saddle sacks were in place, he called impatiently to the slaves to bring the half drowned creature ashore. The Camel's first action was to shake himself violently, drenching everyone on the dock. Then with an angry snort he trod heavily on the toes of Tuzzle and as many more as he could manage to get near.

"Patience! Patience, my precious little parsnip," wheezed the Sultan, wiping the water out of his eyes with his sleeve and motioning for the Keeper of the Camels to approach. "Let him be given a triple portion of dried peas and rice, and with my own hands I will remove his heavy trappings." At this, Camy, remembering the ill-natured kicks and prods given by his former master, let out such a squeal of defiance that the courtiers tumbled in every direction to get



The Comfortable Camel's good temper returned out of his way. But the Camel Driver, slipping a stout noose over his head, forced him unwillingly up the bank and toward the Royal Camel Quarters behind the castle. The Sultan, fairly bubbling over with relief and excitement, pattered after him, for he, for very good reasons of his own, did not want the Camel out of his sight for an instant.

"Has your Highness no word of welcome or commendation for me?" complained Tuzzle, limping aggrievedly beside the Sultan. "Do you not desire to hear of my reception at Ozma's court and of the masterful manner in which I was finally able to restore this long missing miscreant to your Majesty's stable? Have I sought out and captured this capricious Camel by main strength only to be ignored and stepped upon?"

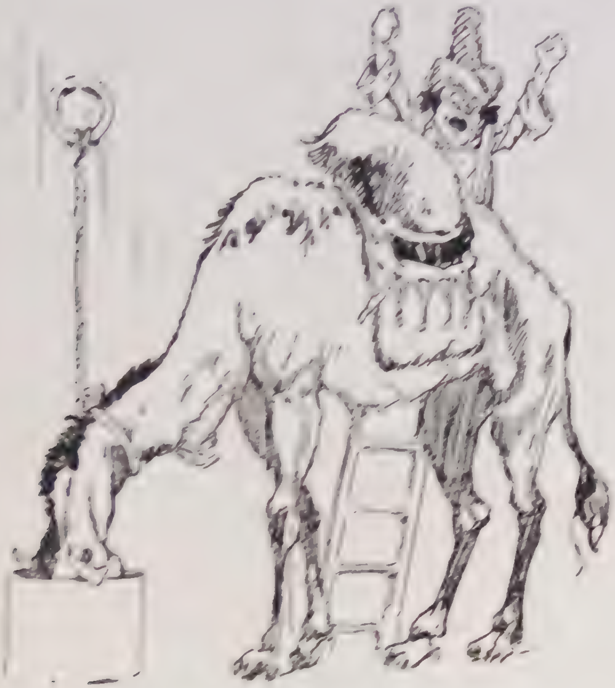
"Posh! Bosh! And a pound of tea!" sputtered the Sultan, waving him carelessly aside, and bidding all of his advisors return to the palace he proceeded joyfully to the stall set aside for the most important member of his herd. There, tied fast to an iron ring in the side of the wall and facing a heaping measure of dried peas and rice, the Comfortable Camel's usual good judgment and temper returned to him. Sir Hokus and Peter, he felt sure, would soon come to his assistance. Meanwhile, he might as well make the best of things and enjoy what he could of the experience. Nibbling daintily at the peas and rice, he paid scant attention to the Sultan, who had dismissed the attendant and was standing on a small ladder at his side. Tossing everything out of the left hand saddle sack, the Sultan suddenly gave such an exclamation of fury that the Comfortable Camel turned his head. The fat little ruler, coming to the bottom of the sack, had found the secret compartment open and the precious package he had been so long seeking and so anxiously waiting for—gone!

"Great, lazy, stupid son of a cow!" bellowed the Sultan, dancing up and down like a dervish on top of the ladder. "What have you done with my dates? Who has taken the dates?"

"Aha!" mused the Camel to himself. "So he is at the bottom of this date magic. It's the dates he wants, and not me at all." And as the enraged Sovereign continued to dance and scream, he went calmly on with his lunch.

"Son of a scorpion," hissed the Sultan vindictively. "Cousin to a cougar and uncle of a goat, how dare you come back without those dates?" Hammering the Camel with both fists, he nearly cried with rage.

"Why, he's even better at calling me names than he used to be," marveled the Camel, paying no heed to the thumps, which hurt him hardly at all. "I must remember all this to tell Hokus—that is, if I can ever talk as I used to do, I'll tell him. Heigho, there goes the fat pest, and good riddance." For the Sultan, seeing nothing was to be got out of the Camel, had finally stopped hammering him and gone away. Rac-



ing back to the palace he sought out Chinda and started to shake the Grand Bozzywoz with all his strength.

"What now?" groaned the astonished Seer, clutching his turban, which was tossing like a ship in a hurricane. "Have you not got your precious Camel back again? Is this gratitude? Is this thanks—or——"

"That silly Camel is of no use to me," screamed the Sultan angrily, almost, in his excitement, revealing the secret of the magic dates. "There was a package of great value in his left hand saddle sack. It has been lost—or stolen!" he panted desperately. "And I must have that package at once, at once, do you hear me?"

"Package?" repeated Chinda dully. "Well, why did your Excellency not say so in the first place? All these years I have been seeking a Camel, and now you tell me it is a package and not a Camel you desire."

"Silence!" shrieked the Sultan, beginning to shake him again, and in the next breath, "Speak, fellow, have you nothing in your head at all?"

"The telescope!" puffed Chinda, jerking away from his tempery little master. "Let us consult the magic telescope and see what it can tell us of this strange matter." For ten minutes in his tall, glass enclosed tower, the Chief Seer and Grand Bozzywoz of Saman-

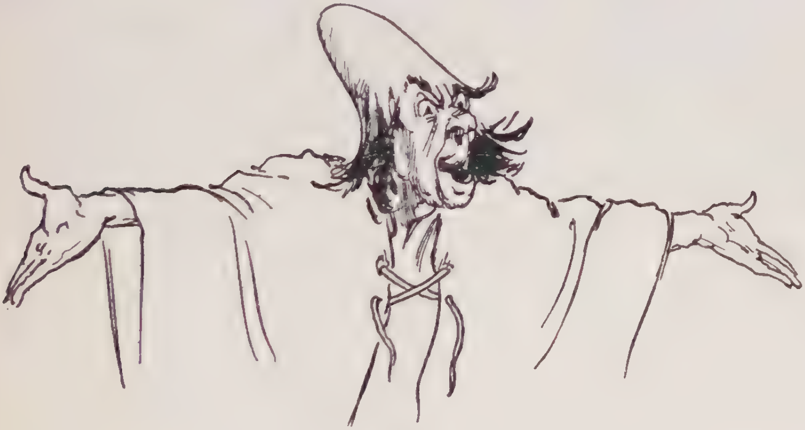
Chapter Twelve

dra gazed through the magic lens of his huge telescope; then, turning to the Sultan, who was stamping anxiously up and down the laboratory, he spoke:

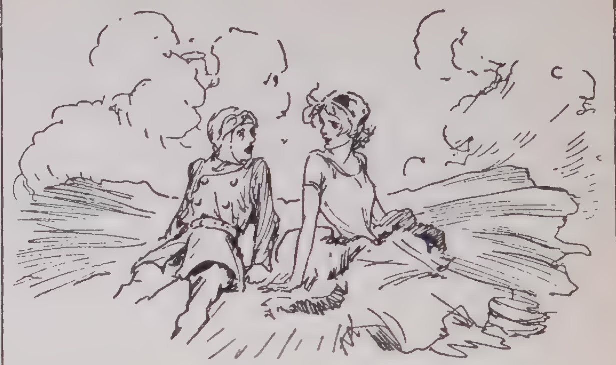
"You will find part of what you seek in the middle of the night," he announced solemnly.

"In the middle of the night?" gasped the Sultan. "But where, how, and what night?"

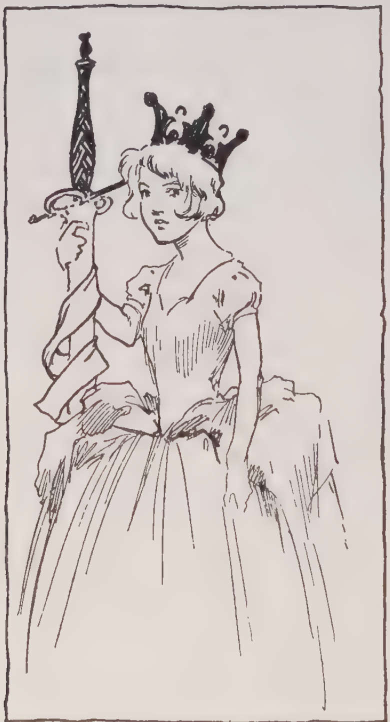
"More I cannot tell you now, but if your Highness will depart and leave me, I will go into a great silence and endeavor to discover the exact location of the missing package." Far from satisfied, but not knowing what else to do, the Sultan returned reluctantly to his throne room. There, clutching Confido to his breast, he whispered long and anxiously to the Imperial Peke and waited impatiently for nightfall.



KING OF THE QUIX!



CHAPTER THIRTEEN



AND now, leaving the Sultan and the Comfortable Camel to their own devices, let us see what has been happening to Marygolden and Speedy. Fortunately for its two passengers, the parashuter struck a dry and sandy section of earth so that they were neither crushed by falling rock nor scalded by boiling lava. Whistling like a roman candle and forced upward by the rocket set off when Speedy touched the button in the handle, Uncle Billy's strange invention shot upward so fast that the boy lost all sense of time, space, and distance. And just as he was deciding they would never reach the upper regions at all, the steel umbrella burst through the top crust of earth, fluttered a few feet in the air and then dropped heavily to the ground.

"Are—we—still—alive?" inquired Marygolden in a faint voice.

"I—I think so," mumbled Speedy, who had bumped his head pretty hard on the handle of the parashuter.

"Sometimes it hurts to be alive," sighed Marygolden, looking reproachfully over at him, for the little Princess had come down hard in the middle of a rocky path. Both adventurers were covered with dirt and grime, and had their umbrella-like contrivance not travelled with such lightning speed they would probably have been suffocated as well. As it was, they were perfectly exhausted and lay for several minutes where they had fallen. Then, rolling over, Speedy unfastened the straps that bound him to the handle, and giving himself a little shake, stood up.

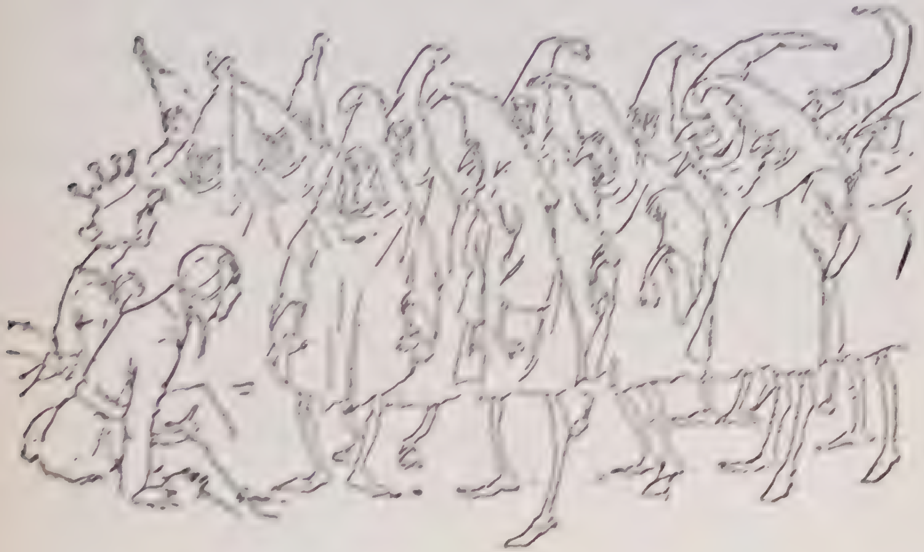
"Well, I hope this time we're in America," he breathed anxiously, leaning down to untie Marygolden. The golden Princess winced a bit as Speedy helped her to her feet, and afraid that she might cry, he patted her reassuringly on the shoulder. But Marygolden straightened up like a soldier and the boy could not help feeling proud of the way she was taking their strange experiences. "Anyway, we're out of Subterranea and we've escaped from that awful old Shah!" he exclaimed, beating the dust from his leather jacket.

"Yes," agreed Marygolden gravely. "We're away from the Shah, but who are these?"

"These?" cried Speedy, whirling round. "Well, curses macorangejuice!" This was a favorite expression of the boy's, but even this did not seem surprising enough for the strange figures racing toward them. There were twelve, and their long, thin legs, long, thin arms, long, thin bodies, long, thin faces, and long, thin hair gave them an unreal and comical appearance. They were dressed in silver cloth jackets and hose and pointed hoods, and when they reached Speedy and the Princess they took hands and danced round and round them so fast that the two could do nothing but blink and gasp and draw in their toes to keep from being stepped on. The twinkle of the sun on their silver hoods was making Speedy dreadfully giddy, when all twelve suddenly stopped, and the tallest of the company, drawing a long scroll from his coat, cried loudly:

"The prophecy has been fulfilled. Behold our King!"

"Nonsense!" blustered Speedy, trying to push his way out of the ring, "Nonsense, I'm a Republican!" Then, as the holder of the scroll began to read the strange document, his curiosity got the better of him.



"I, Hurreewurree the Worst, Chief Counsellor of the Quix, do hereby pronounce you King," boomed the silver-clad leader impressively. "Our humble sovereign having run away, it has been prophesied by the Book of Stars that our next ruler would burst from the earth, as you must admit you have done, that our next ruler would be young and exceeding quick, quick to fight, quick to run, and quick to lose his temper—" ("Well, all that's true enough," thought Speedy, with an amused chuckle, as the Chief Counsellor looked at him over his specs.) "And his name shall mean Swift," continued Hurreewurree. "What *is* your name?" he inquired solemnly, holding his finger on the scroll to keep his place.

"Speedy!" answered the boy, without giving himself time to think.

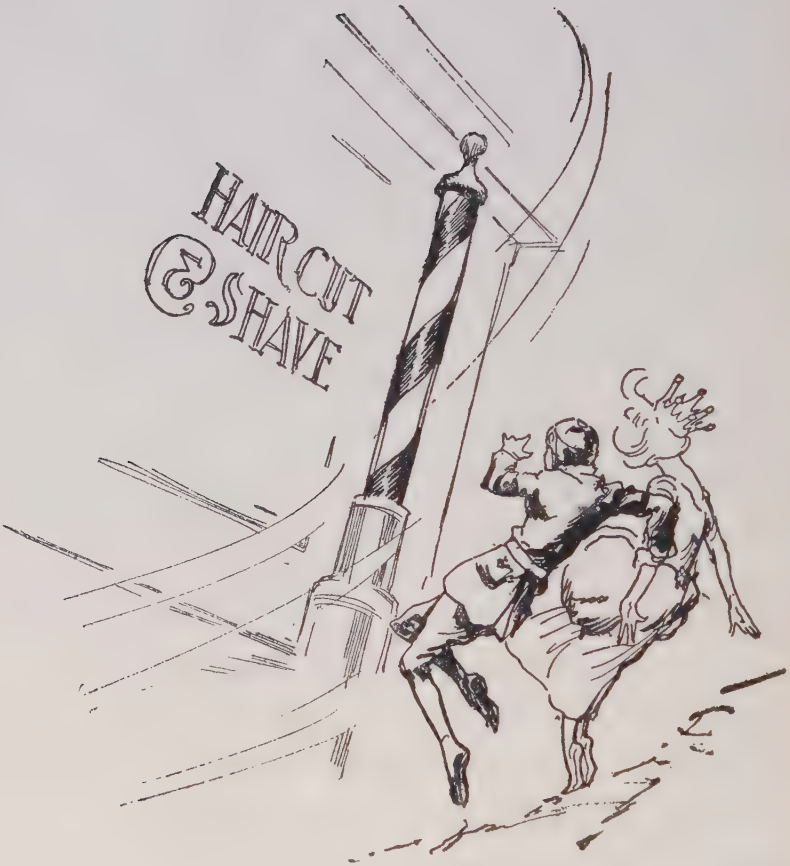
"Speedy!" exulted the Chief Counsellor, waving the prophecy over his head. "Do you hear that? Three cheers for Speedy, King of the Quix!" With three hilarious cheers, the long-legged strangers closed in. Speedy had just time to grasp Marygolden's hand before they were seized on all sides and hustled forward. Soon they were flying along so fast he had not breath enough to ask even one question.

"To keep things running here you must keep moving," puffed Hurreewurree, "and as soon as we catch the castle you'll be crowned."

Chapter Thirteen

"Catch the castle?" panted Speedy. "Does that run, too?" Nobody bothered to answer his question, but when they came to Quick City he saw what Hurreewurree meant, for all the houses and buildings rolled about like taxis. "Why, this is worse than New York!" marvelled Speedy, as they were almost knocked down by a barber shop. "Why, instead of running down to the bank, the bank runs down to you. Gosh!" gasped the boy, as a teller leaned out of the window of a passing bank building and took a roll of quicksilver from Hurreewurree. All the inhabitants of this curious city dashed by as if they were running races, and when one of Speedy's guards tried to stop a Quick and introduce him to the new King, the fellow burst into tears.

"Don't stop me!" he cried fretfully. "Can't you let me eat this piece of taffy before I'm too old to enjoy it?" And now Speedy noticed another queer thing about the Quix. Even while he was looking at them they changed and grew older. Hurreewurree, who had been quite young and handsome when he read his proclamation, was becoming more bent and feeble at every step and when they finally did catch up with a tidy silver castle, the Chief Counsellor had hardly enough strength to stagger up the steps. The other


HAIR CUT
& SHAVE

Buildings rolled by like taxis

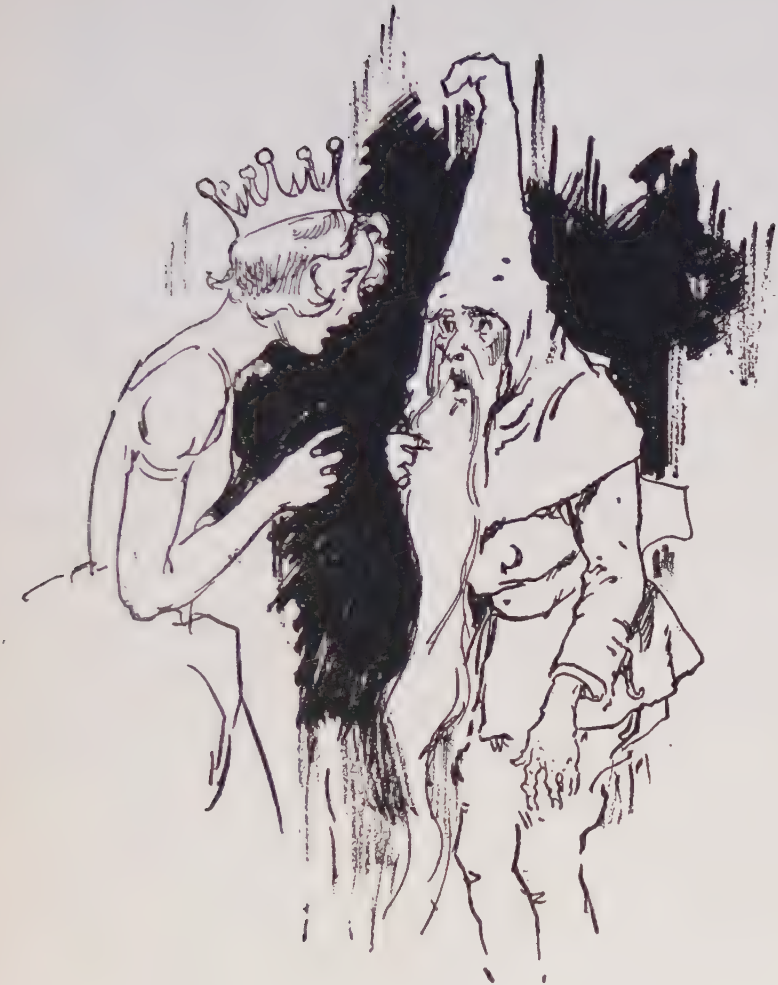
Quix were old men, too, and with a great effort tugged Speedy and Marygolden into the royal dwelling. Speedy was so weary from the long run, and so astonished by the change in his companions that he sank thankfully down upon the silver throne and tried to smile encouragingly at Marygolden, who had been placed in a silver chair at his side.

"We don't have to stay unless we want to," he whispered, as Hurrewurree, taking a silver hood from an ancient servitor, tottered uncertainly toward him.

"With this Lively Hood, I crown you King of the Quix!" quavered Hurreewurree, snatching the leather helmet from Speedy's head and dropping the Hood in its place. "What are your Right Royal Commands?"

"Nothing right now," panted Speedy, in as imperious a pant as he could manage. "As soon as they go, I'll leave," he decided quickly to himself. "They needn't think I'm going to spend the rest of my life running like a jack rabbit, dodging barber shops and telegraph poles. Why, it's ridiculous—everything's ridiculous!" he concluded with a slight shudder, as the castle coasted down a steep street and just missed a stone wall at the bottom. Still another shock awaited him when he turned his gaze from the windows back into the throne room. Hurreewurree and his companions were growing young again, and as Speedy and Marygolden simply stared at them, their long silver whiskers fell away, their crooked legs straightened and presently they were young men. But Speedy had no sooner grown used to this than they grew younger still, and pretty soon they were all sitting on the floor in silver rompers playing with blocks. Much to his surprise he wanted to play, too, but when he tried to step down from his throne he fell off and bumped his head so hard he began to cry bitterly. Marygolden it was who picked him up, and he could only stare at her with round eyes for she seemed like a giantess now, for he was only ten months old. But this lasted scarcely ten minutes or so, and then he found he could walk, and scrambling down from her lap he got into an exciting game of tag with his subjects. Speedy could not imagine why Marygolden was crying. He stopped to comfort her and was soon tall enough to get back on his throne. But it was terribly confusing, for in ten minutes the little Princess was crying again.

"Look! Look!" she wailed, pointing to his chin; and putting up his hand fearfully, Speedy discovered that he had a long silver beard. His voice, when he tried to speak, was so high and shrill that it startled him; his knees felt stiff, and his head ached!



HE HAD A LONG SILVER BEARD

"Why, I'm a Quick," groaned poor old Speedy, looking anxiously at his thin hands. "I'm a Quick, and I'll have to spend the rest of my days shooting up and down like an elevator. Gosh, what'll I do?" As he started to grow younger, his thoughts became clearer. "It's the Hood," he decided frantically. "If I take off this Hood I'll be all right, but then suppose I take it off when I'm old, then I'll be all wrong. Gosh! Golly, what a fix to be in!" By this time he was a little boy again, and before he could explain to Marygolden, he was a baby. And not until he had shot up to young manhood could he make the little Princess understand what to do.

"As soon as I look the way I did when you first saw me, pull off this Hood," he begged eagerly, "and do be careful, Mary dear, not to make me any older than I am. I don't want to miss half my life and all the fun of college." Marygolden nodded and watched Speedy solemnly as he grew older and older, and still more solemnly as he grew younger, and as the boy reached the exact age he had been when he plunged into Subterranea, the clever little Princess pulled the Lively Hood from his head and threw it as far as she could. With one bounce Speedy was off the throne.

"Girl, that was neat!" he whispered, looking thankfully in the mirror over the mantel. "Why, you couldn't have done any better if you'd been a boy. Now, as soon as these fellows grow down a bit further, we'll run." Hurreewurree and the other boys were so engrossed in a marble game that they did not notice their new King tiptoeing toward the door. And by the time Speedy and Marygolden were scampering down the steps of the moving castle, they and all the other inhabitants of Quick City were infants again. "You certainly have to think and step quick in this country," puffed Speedy, as they ran hand in hand down the main street of the town. Having had a lot of practice dodging motors, he managed to keep out of the path of the whirling houses and shops, and by the time the Quix were growing up again, he and Marygolden had left the city far behind them. Even in the fields and orchards on the outskirts of the town the curious nature of the country persisted. Flowers grew up and wilted under their feet. Fruit ripened and fell from the trees before they could eat it. After several unsuccessful attempts to pick some peaches, only to have them rot in his hands, Speedy gave up. Indeed it was with something like relief that they came to a cool, deep forest, where trees neither shot up nor down, and everything was pleasantly quiet and still.

"We'll stop here a long, long time," sighed Speedy, sitting down under a great oak. "Then I'll try to find you something to eat and discover where we are. I'm sure it's not America, for things like this couldn't happen in America. Say, I wonder why those fellows wanted me for King! Can you imagine being King of a place like that?"

Marygolden shook her head and smoothed out her dress. "I like it better here," she said contentedly.

"Well, I do too, but I don't think I'm going to like growing old very much. It felt awful." Speedy rubbed his knees reminiscently and wondered what Uncle Billy would think of his adventures. "I'm certainly having a lot of experiences," he muttered reflectively. "And you know," he turned thoughtfully to look at the little Princess sitting so quietly at his side, "you're the very strangest of them all. I can't make you out in the least, Marygolden. If you were just a statue, and were never alive before, how is it you can talk, and know how to act? And now that you are alive, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to do everything you do," announced Marygolden calmly.

"Gosh!" breathed Speedy, rather frightened by the responsibility of such a thing. "Then I'll have to be pretty careful about everything I do, won't I?"

"Yes," smiled the Princess, folding her hands serenely in her lap. Speedy was about to explain that she, being a girl, could not possibly do all the exciting and adventurous things that he, as a boy, could do, but she seemed so pleased and happy that he decided to let the matter rest for a while.

"She's certainly done everything I've done so far," he reflected slowly, "except grow whiskers! And she didn't cry when we fell, either. You're all right!" he announced emphatically, and leaning over he gave her a real boyish handshake. "You're all right, and a real good fellow!"

THE ENCHANTED FOREST

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

AFTER the rush and hurry of Quick City, both travellers were glad enough to rest quietly under the oak tree. Leaning back with his head against the broad trunk, Speedy tried to puzzle out and explain to himself the queer happenings of the morning. But there seemed no reasonable explanation of Subterranea or Quick City, or the curious coming to life of Marygolden, and with a little sigh he finally stopped bothering and turned his attention back to his companion.

"Do you ever remember seeing that Shah, or any of those people before?" he inquired earnestly.

"I don't remember anyone but you," answered Marygolden, fixing her eyes dreamily on the bit of sky just visible above the tree tops.

"Well," pondered Speedy, "if you were alive before, you must have lived in some old, old country. You know, you're dreadfully old-fashioned, Marygolden."

"Do you mind?" asked the Princess, leaning forward anxiously.

"No," Speedy assured her gallantly. "But I should think you would." His glance travelled critically from her long, frilled skirts, now sadly torn and dusty, to the stiff, high, and certainly uncomfortable ruff. "Girls don't wear such long skirts nowadays," he explained apologetically. "I say, shall I cut off some of that stuff?" The Princess seemed quite interested in the idea, so Speedy, taking out his scout knife, which fortunately had a scissor attachment, snipped all the lace ruffles from her gold dress, making it about knee length. Then he cut off her huge, uncomfortable ruff and stood back, quite pleased with the result. "If it wasn't for that crown you'd look just like a regular girl," declared Speedy, returning the knife to his pocket. At these words, and before he could stop her, Marygolden took off her crown and flung it as far as she possibly could.

"Curses!" muttered the boy with a worried bounce. "You shouldn't have done that, Mary. It's probably worth a lot of money."

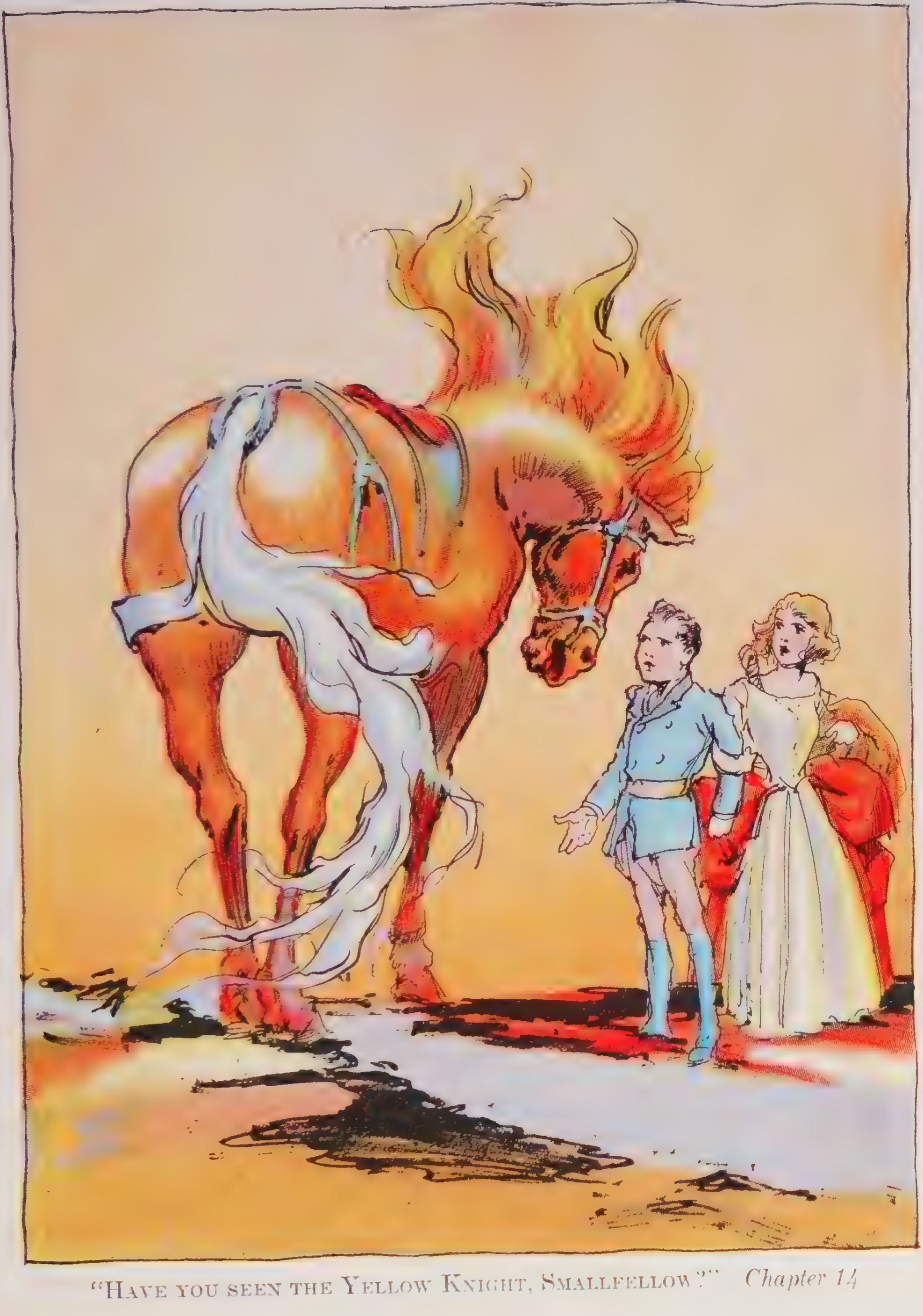
"But it makes my head ache," stated the Princess calmly, "and what good is it anyway?"

"Oh, well," decided Speedy, after looking without success for the golden circlet, "I guess you won't need a crown now, for you're going home with me, if I can ever find the way, and they don't use crowns in America."

"America?" asked the Princess, taking a few dancing steps to see how it felt without her long, trailing skirts. "Shall we reach there soon?"

"Not unless we start," answered Speedy. "And unless we want to spend the rest of the day in this forest, we'd better start right away." Marygolden made no objection, so talking quite cheerfully they strolled along under the giant trees.

"Pretty soon, now," observed Speedy, helping the



"HAVE YOU SEEN THE YELLOW KNIGHT, SMALLFELLOW?" *Chapter 14*

Princess over a little brook, "pretty soon now we ought to be meeting some people."

"People!" sniffed Marygolden, turning up her pretty nose. "Every time we meet people we run. I'd rather not meet any people, Speedy."

"Maybe the next ones will be good fellows. Maybe they'll give us something to eat and tell us where we are. We can't just go on and on forever," he explained, leaning down to examine a colored stone at his feet.

"Is there no other way of getting about, then?" inquired Marygolden, staring sorrowfully at her gold kid slippers, which were already sadly scratched and torn by the sticks and stones of the forest. "Must we always walk and run?"

"If we were in my country we could take a bus, or a train, or a taxi; but there's nothing to take here," answered Speedy in a matter-of-fact voice, and finally deciding that the stone he had picked up was of no value, he sent it flying into the branches of a horse chestnut tree. With speed and accuracy it hit a large chestnut burr and the burr, sailing through the air, dropped directly in his path. As Speedy was about to pick it up, it began to swell like a balloon, larger and larger till it was simply immense; and as Speedy and

Marygolden jumped back together, it burst with a loud bang and out trotted a shining chestnut steed. He wore a breastplate of gold, yellow silk trappings, a gold-trimmed saddle, and had such a glorious, golden, flyaway mane and tail that Speedy, in spite of his fright and astonishment, gave a cry of pure delight and admiration. The horse, lifting his head, looked about a bit wildly and began to paw up the earth with his forefoot.

"Do you see that?" gasped Speedy, holding fast to Marygolden's arm in case the wonderful horse should spring forward. "One minute there was a horse chestnut and now there's a chestnut horse. Girl! Girl! What a country!"

"Is it something to ride?" whispered Marygolden, not in the least upset by the miraculous appearance of this stunning steed. "Is it yours?"

"I belong to the Yellow Knight," trumpeted the horse, with a quick toss of his golden mane. "Have you seen the Yellow Knight, Smallfellow?"

"Knight!" breathed Speedy in a hushed voice. "I didn't know there were any Knights nowadays. And listen to that, Marygolden, he's talking; that horse is talking to us. Wait! Stop!" he called excitedly, as the horse, wheeling round and round, showed signs of galloping off. "Wait, I want to ask you something. How is it one moment you were a chestnut burr, and the next moment a horse? How is it you can talk? Horses in my country only say 'neigh'."

"Nay!" snorted the Knight's horse, pausing with one foot uplifted. "What a stupid country yours must be. What do they do when they wish to say yes, or answer a question?"

"Nobody asks them questions," answered Speedy, quite truthfully. "They just tell them what to do."

"Worse and worse," whinnied the horse disapprovingly. "Why, hereabouts all the animals can talk. You asked me how I happened to be a chestnut burr, didn't you? Well, as to that, I think I've been enchanted, and someone has just broken the spell."

"It was Speedy," cried Marygolden, pointing proudly to the boy. "He threw a stone at the horse chestnut tree and knocked down the burr, and there you were!"

"Well, in that case," mused the horse thoughtfully, "I owe you a great debt of gratitude. You have no idea how it feels to be cooped up in a chestnut burr. Speak up, Smallfellow, what can I do for you? What is your name, and where are you going?"

"My name is Speedy, I'm from the United States, and would like to get back there if I could. I found Marygolden in a cave. She was enchanted, too, I guess, but she's all right now. Could you let us ride on your back and help us find our way back to America?"

"That place where horses can only say 'neigh, neigh'?" questioned the Knight's steed uneasily. "Where they are dumb as fish, and ordered about like slaves? Nay, nay! Good turnips, Smallfellow! You have me saying it already! Nay, an' I will not go there, but I'll tell you what I will do," he offered generously, noticing Speedy's disappointed expression. "I'll not go with you, but you may come with me until I find the Yellow Knight, and perhaps he can tell you the way back to your own country. Come! Will you go? Decide quickly for I long to stretch my legs again." It did not take Speedy long to decide. Putting his foot in the golden stirrup, he gave such a spring that he landed safely in the splendid saddle of the Yellow Knight. Then he looked doubtfully down at Marygolden.

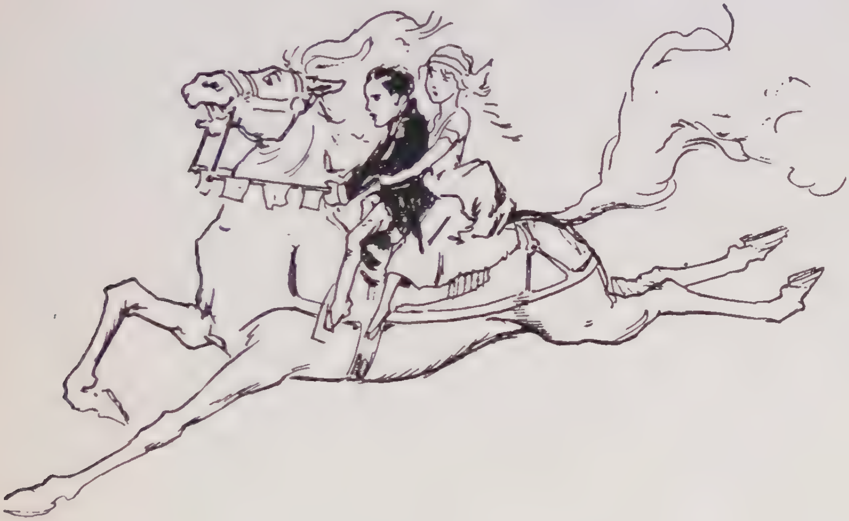
"Can the little wench ride?" inquired the horse, beginning to prance with impatience. "Can the little baggage stick on?"

"I can do anything Speedy can do," declared the

Princess stoutly, and mounting a tree stump she motioned imperiously for the horse to approach.

"What's your name?" asked Speedy, as the big chestnut trotted obligingly over to the tree stump.

"Stampedro!" cried the horse, with a joyous toss of his head. "Up with you, maiden, and away we'll be going!" And scarcely had Marygolden seated herself behind Speedy and clasped her arms round his waist, before Stampedro set off at such a pace that both riders had all they could do to hang on. To himself, Speedy pretended he was really the Yellow Knight with long gleaming lance and gold armor. He



only wished Uncle Billy or some of the fellows could see him galloping through the forest on this great shining steed, and though the Knight's saddle was uncommonly hard, and the bumps and bouncing terrific, he would not have changed places with Lindy himself. After a while Stampedro slackened his speed, much to the relief of Marygolden, thumping up and down behind.

"AH—HH!" snorted the Knight's horse. " 'Tis fine to breathe this keen air and feel the good earth underfoot again. It's good to be alive, and could I see my young Master, no more would I ask."

"Was—he—en—chanted—too?" asked Speedy, quite breathless from the jouncing he had received. "Say, why didn't I bring along that stone? There must have been something magic about that stone, for it turned you from a chestnut burr to a chestnut horse. And if you ask me, there's something magic about this whole country."

"Right in both cases," agreed Stampedro amiably. "This is the Magical Country of Oz."

"Oz!" sputtered Speedy, sitting up very straight. "Why, I've often read about Oz, but I never thought it was really true."

"Well, what do you think now?" queried the horse, looking over his shoulder to wink good-naturedly at Marygolden.

"It must be true," conceded the boy slowly, "for you see, we're here. Do you know what part of Oz we're in, Stampedro?" The horse stopped short in his tracks and thought so intently that his ears crossed and his mane stood up and waved to and fro, but, think as he would, he could not remember.

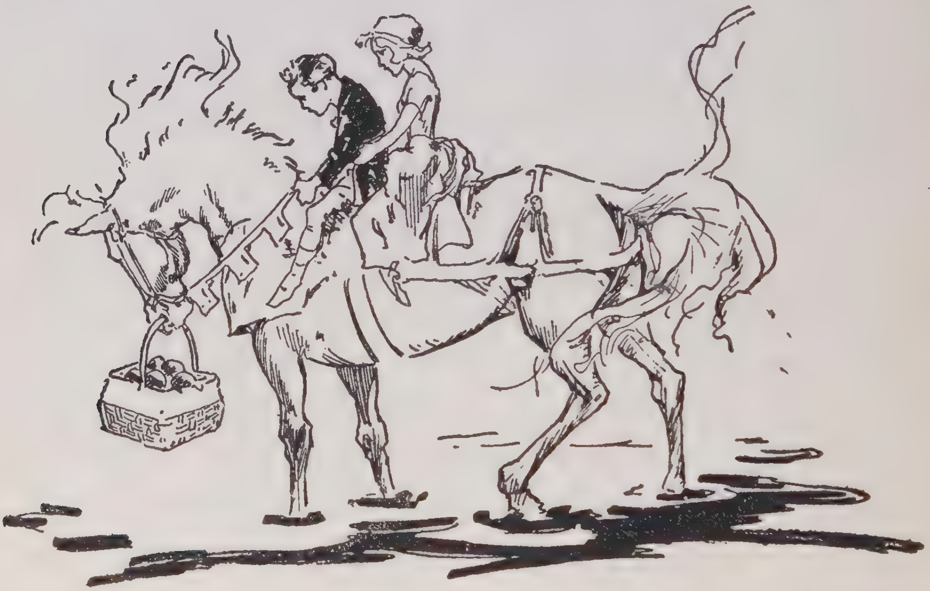
"It's that wretched enchantment," he wheezed crossly. "I've been a chestnut inside of a burr so long I've forgotten everything."

"But you remembered the Yellow Knight," Marygolden reminded him softly, "and if we find him, perhaps he can tell us where we are."

"Maybe we'd better go back and hunt that magic stone," suggested Speedy, as Stampedro, shouldering his way through some low bushes, came to a rushing yellow river. So far and so fast had he galloped that they were entirely out of the forest and moving swiftly toward a pleasant orange grove.

"Too late," sighed Stampedro, picking his way carefully along the slippery bank of the stream. "We'd never find the place again. Besides, I do not think my Master was enchanted. He's far too clever for such trickery. Hello, what's this?" This was a bright yellow basket floating merrily along with the current. "Want it?" whinnied Stampedro, and as both his riders nodded enthusiastically he stepped daintily into the river and lifted the basket in his teeth.

"Wonder what's in it," muttered Speedy, leaning forward eagerly to take the basket. "Why, hurray, it's something to eat! Chicken, Marygolden! Bread, fruit, cake, and everything! Here, have a chicken wing, and do try this apricot." Marygolden obediently took the articles Speedy handed to her, but she



did not seem to know what to do with them. Speedy, buried to the ears in a piece of frosted cake, looked back at her in surprise.

"Aren't you hungry?" he asked, gulping down his great bite of cake so fast he almost choked. "My goodness, I forgot! You don't even know how to eat. Here, girl, watch me, and do just what I do."

"What manner of maiden is this Marygolden?" rumbled Stampedro. "A maiden who does not eat? Is she a fairy?"

"No, she's a Princess," explained the boy, biting off a piece of chicken leg and motioning for Marygolden to do the same with her wing. "Like it?" he asked, as Marygolden took a thoughtful nibble.

"Mm—mm! Yes!" sighed the Princess, chewing faster and faster. "See, I can eat just as fast as you can now!" And as both travellers were ever so hungry, there was soon nothing left in the basket at all. Speedy had given several apples to Stampedro and he was now finishing his lunch on the moist river-grass, while Speedy and the Princess sampled the golden oranges, which they could pick quite easily as the great horse walked beneath the branches.

"You've brought us good luck already," said Speedy, looking regretfully into the empty basket.

He was about to toss it away when a sentence stamped on the bottom caught his attention.

" 'Made in Samandra'," read Speedy with a puzzled look. "I wonder where that is? And how did this basket come to be in the river?" As a matter of fact, the basket had tumbled from the yellow boat when Tuzzle and his men were capturing the Comfortable Camel, but of course Speedy could know nothing of this and continued to stare at the gay blue letters.

"Samandra!" he repeated slowly. "What kind of a country could that be?"

"Samandra?" coughed Stampedro, stopping his eating and putting one ear forward and one ear backward. "It seems to me I remember something disagreeable about that place. Humph—HAH!" The Knight's horse trumpeted so loudly and suddenly that Marygolden nearly tumbled off backwards. "I know!" he wheezed grimly. "It's a country like that America you were telling me about, the only country in Oz where animals can't talk."

"Then let's keep away from there," said Speedy, for he enjoyed the experience of a talking steed.

"But Samandra," continued the chestnut solemnly, "Samandra lies near the country of the Yellow Knight. I remember riding through there long ago, and being struck dumb for two days. Now why can't I remember the name of my own country?"

"Well, if we're near one we must be near both of them," reasoned Speedy. "And maybe there'll be some sign posts beyond this orange grove, or somebody who can tell us where we are."

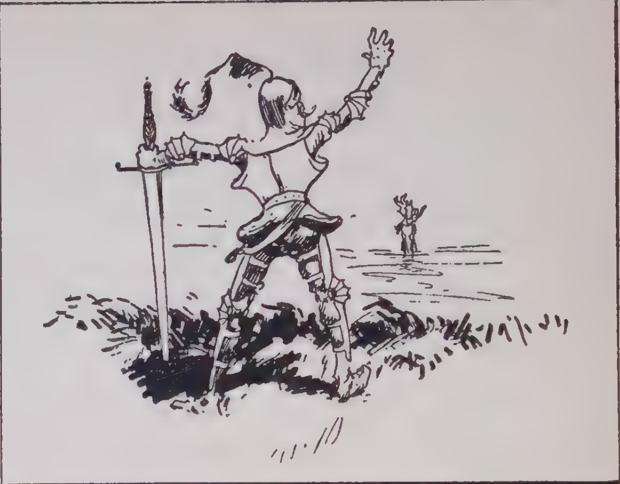
"There's somebody now," cried Marygolden, tugging Speedy's coat. "There, on the other side of the river! Oh dear, now we shall have to run again."

"Good golly, it's a Knight!" exclaimed Speedy, standing up in the stirrups. "Look! Look, Stampedro, is that your Master?" Spinning round so quickly he almost spilled both of his riders, the splendid chestnut faced the opposite bank, his breath coming in short, smoky pants. Then his head dropped.

"What a start you gave me, Smallfellow," he sighed reproachfully. "This Knight wears silver armor; my Master wears gold. This Knight is old and thin; my Master is young and hearty. No, no, it is not he." Stampedro's head fell lower and lower until his long golden mane swept the ground, and sorrowfully he turned away. But Speedy, nothing daunted, leaned far out of the saddle and shouted loudly:

"Ho! Ho! Hello, Sir Knight! Can you tell me what country we are in?"

FIVE TRAVELLERS MEET



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AT Speedy's lusty cry, Sir Hokus and the jester stopped running and stared in amazement across the river.

"Come now, this is better," chuckled Peter, shading his eyes with his hand and gazing across with lively interest at the travelers. "A page and a Princess, or I miss my guess."

"And a horse," breathed the Knight, his eye sparkling with pleasure. "Such a steed as I've not seen these many long years. An' they lend me yon noble beast I'll overtake that fat camel-snatcher in no time. What ho!" he called loudly. "Can'st lend me your horse, fellow, to catch the greatest rascal in the country?"

"Rascal?" gulped Speedy. "Why, this sounds interesting!" And Stampedro, being of the same mind, stepped boldly into the yellow river, swam strongly across, and climbed up the steep bank.

"Happily met, travellers!" cried Peter Pun, throwing up his belled cap. Then, running alongside the great charger, he stared inquisitively up at Marygolden. "Are you, perchance, a damsel in distress?" he queried saucily. "For know that this Knight is sworn to rescue a maid, serve a monarch, and slay a monster. Dost wish to be rescued, maiden? Speak the word and 'twill be done."

"I'm taking care of Marygolden," said Speedy stiffly. "I found her and brought her to life, and she's going back to America with me."

"America!" boomed Sir Hokus, striding closer. "Art from America, young man? And this horse—is he from America, too?"

"Oh, no, no, no! We found him in the forest. Tell them about it, Stampedro," begged the boy, who wanted to do nothing but feast his eyes on the Knight's sword and armor. With a toss of his flying mane, Stampedro began to speak, but a long shrill neigh was the best he could manage. Terrified and dismayed, he reared and plunged, and had not Sir Hokus seized his bit, Speedy and Marygolden would have sailed over his head.

"Steady now! Steady! What means this?" puffed the Knight, stroking the glossy neck soothingly.

"I know! I know!" Speedy stood straight up in the stirrups. "It means we're in Samandra, that country where animals cannot talk. Don't you care!" he whispered consolingly in the great chestnut steed's ear. "You can still hear, can't you?" Stampedro nodded his head to show that he could. "Well, then," continued Speedy, "cheer up, for if we're in Samandra we must be near the Kingdom of your Master. Can you tell us anything about the Yellow Knight?" asked Speedy, sliding down from the saddle and staring earnestly up at Sir Hokus. "This grand horse belongs to the Yellow Knight of Oz, but he's been enchanted for years and years. He was a horse chestnut till I flung a stone at the tree, and then he turned into a real chestnut horse."

Chapter Fifteen

"Enchantments! Still more enchantments. Odds helmets and hauberks!" stuttered Sir Hokus, falling back against a tree and forgetting all about Camy for the moment. "Odds helmets and hauberks! It must have been the same stone that restored Peter. Did'st pick up the stone in yonder forest, my boy?"

"Hey bowstrings and fiddles, they're talking in riddles,
But, Hokus, take heed, I remember that steed!"

"Hast ever seen me before, good horse?" inquired Peter Pun, capering close to the pawing charger. Stampedro, after a close look at the jester, nodded emphatically.

"Well, what do you know about that?" mused Speedy, gazing from one to the other.

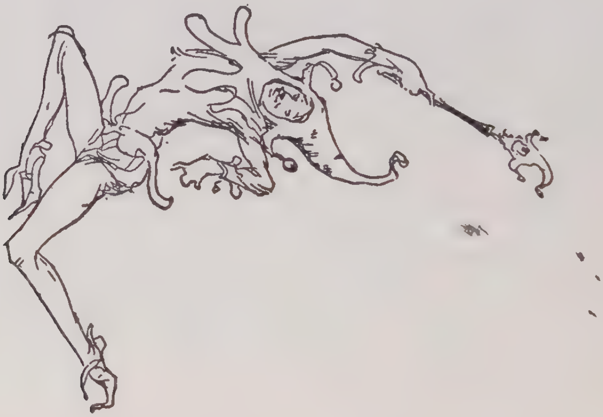
"What you *you* know about it?" demanded Peter Pun, turning a somersault and coming top side up under Speedy's very nose.

"Well," sighed the boy, "everything's so mixed up and strange, I hardly know what to think. But you all seem to belong together somehow," he continued seriously, "you and this Knight and Stampedro. Even Marygolden," he added reluctantly. "But I don't see how you can all be alive to-day."

"Why not to-day as well as yesterday, why not yesterday as well as to-morrow?" queried Peter Pun blandly, sitting down cross-legged in the grass.

"Because in our part of the world," persisted Speedy in a puzzled voice, "Knights and jesters lived ages and ages ago and now they're all dead."

"What a country!" groaned Peter, toppling over backwards. "Why, we're all ages in Oz and no one ever dies at all. Have you no Kings, Knights, jesters, wizards, or enchantments where you come from? A dreadful place it must be."



"Oh, I wouldn't say that," answered Speedy quickly. "We have motors and airplanes and speed boats and inventors. My uncle's an inventor," he finished proudly, "and that's almost the same as a wizard."

"Quite true," observed Sir Hokus, as Peter Pun shook his head dubiously. "I've heard much about this America from Dorothy and the little mortal maids at the castle; also from a Philadelphia boy who sometimes comes to Oz and visits us in the Emerald City."

"Do *you* live in the Emerald City?" asked Speedy in a hushed voice, while Marygolden regarded the Knight with round eyes.

"To be sure, to be sure. Let me introduce myself," smiled the Knight. "I am Sir Hokus of Pokes, bound upon a quest in search of adventure. This is Peter Pun, a jester, just released from an enchantment. We're both pursuing a fat rogue in a yellow boat who villainously dragged off the Comfortable Camel. But tell me, how came you to Oz, and what happened in yonder forest?"

"Plenty," sighed Speedy, leaning up to pat Stampedro on the nose. " I've been about everywhere and everything since morning, even a King."

"You're still a King," piped Peter Pun, chewing a long blade of grass, and when Speedy shook his head the jester still insisted.

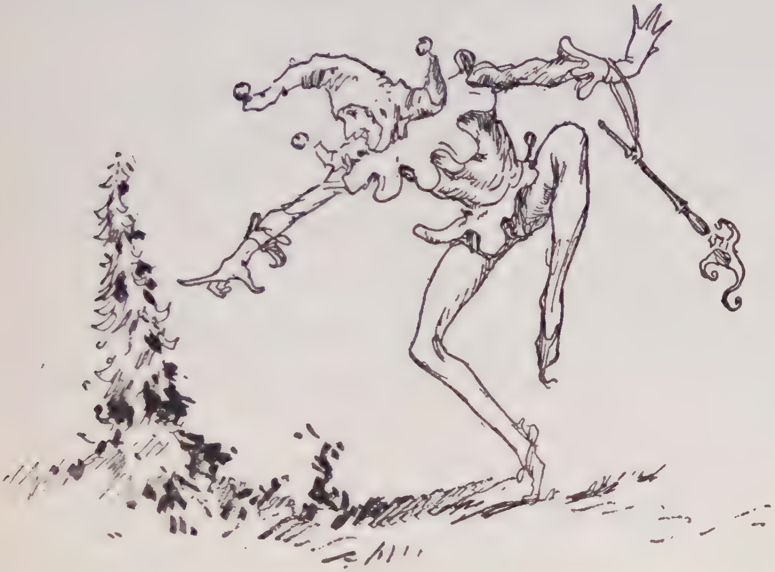
"Admit that you're thin-king this very minute of all the adventures you've been having. Hah, ho!

Shall we pause and listen, Sir Knight, or fare forth and pursue? I confess to a great curiosity concerning these travellers. Let them tell their strange story. We also will tell ours, then together we will resume the chase and rescue our unfortunate friend."

"Good!" decided the Knight. "Methinks there is more mystery here!" and helping Marygolden from her high perch on Stampedro's back, he seated her under an orange tree, and throwing himself on the grass beside her begged Speedy to tell his story. This Speedy was quite willing to do, for when one has had astonishing experiences there is nothing quite so satisfactory as telling about them. Sir Hokus and the jester listened spellbound to his exciting ride in the Skyrocket, his reception in Subterranea, the curious way he had discovered Marygolden and the miraculous coming to life of the little Princess. Their trip up in the parashuter astonished his listeners no less, and Speedy's trials and tribulations as King of the Quix made the Knight and Peter laugh uproariously. But when he came to the finding of the magic stone in the forest, and the disenchantment of Stampedro, Sir Hokus grew grave and thoughtful.

"Of this bewitching little Princess," sighed the Knight, "I can tell you nothing. But this gallant charger——" he waved his sword at Stampedro, who was quietly grazing a little distance away, "this charger evidently belongs to the King of the Golden Castle."

"What ho!" cried the jester. "Our quest progresses. We now have a King to serve and all we need is a damsel and a dragon."



"I'll serve Marygolden an' she will let me," said Sir Hokus, smiling kindly at Speedy's Princess. As Marygolden, with a quaint curtsey, was acknowledging the honor, Peter, peering between two trees, let out an ear-splitting screech.

"A dragon!" yelled the jester, jumping into the air and clicking his heels together. Speedy and Sir Hokus both rushed forward, but there was nary a dragon to be seen. As they turned questioningly back to Peter, the jester burst out laughing and rolled over and over on the grass.

"'Tis a snap-dragon," roared Peter, pointing to a tall blue flower. "Ho, ho, Hokus, I caught you then."

"Bother you and your punning," fumed the Knight angrily. "One more pun and I'll——"

"Well, what's the punishment for puns?" asked Peter, sitting up with an interested expression.

"A punch!" supplied Speedy, winking at Marygolden.

"A punch for a pun, and a punch for a punner—
But the lad with the punch better be a good runner—"

sputtered Peter, hopping up; but Speedy had no intention of chasing him and was already talking seriously to the Knight.

"You know," said the boy earnestly, "I'd sorta like to help you help this King before I go back to America, and I believe I will!"

"Bravo!" roared Sir Hokus, giving Speedy a thump on the back that made him blink. "And when we have found and disenchanted this King, I will take you and Marygolden back to the Emerald City, and Ozma with her magic belt will transport you both to America. How will that be?"

"Just fine," beamed Speedy, seizing the Knight's hand and shaking it heartily.

"And now," put in Peter Pun, cartwheeling up to Sir Hokus, "if all the speechifying's over, let me tell you something. This steed belongs to the King's son at whose court I was jester. I remember him distinctly now."

"Then that King's son must be the Yellow Knight!" cried Speedy jubilantly. "Did you say you had found his father's castle, Sir Hokus? Where? How? When?"

"A pretty tale it is and new,
Hocus Pocus, tell him true,"

chuckled Peter. As Speedy drew closer to the Knight and motioned for Stampedro to come nearer, too, Sir Hokus told his story and all that had happened since he left the capital. He hurried a bit over his adventures in Marshland and on the flying field, but described the deserted city in great detail, and the finding of the package of dates in Camy's saddle sack, the strange changing of the funnysuckle vine into Peter Pun when he flung the date seed, and finally of the sudden theft of the Comfortable Camel by the fat owner of the yellow boat. As he finished, Speedy started up in great excitement. "Why, everything," puffed the boy earnestly, "everything depends on that Camel! Don't you see? The magic dates were in the Camel's saddle sack. Whoever stole the Camel knew about the dates; whoever knew the dates must have enchanted Stampedro and Peter and this King and all his subjects."

"Dirks and daggers!" thundered the Knight. "You are right! What a head you have, young man." Stampedro, who had listened attentively to all this, whinnied his agreement to the Knight's statement, touching Speedy gently on the shoulder with his soft nose and tossing his mane to express his satisfaction.

"Speedy can do anything," smiled Marygolden, jumping up and clapping her hands in delight. "Just try him!" Speedy looked a little uncomfortable at all this praise.

"Tell me," he asked quickly, for he had thought of something else, "did this Comfortable Camel always live in the Emerald City?"

"Yes—no—let me see!" Sir Hokus, already on his feet and ready to start, paused explosively. "Why, I discovered him and the Doubtful Dromedary myself," he explained thoughtfully. "Dorothy, the Cowardly Lion, and I found them about ten years ago on the edge of the Deadly Desert, but as far as I can remember, they never spoke of their former country or master."

"Do you think anyone in the Emerald City knew about those dates, or would anyone there be mean enough to transform a whole kingdom?"

"No," decided Sir Hokus, with a positive shake of his head. "And now that I think of it, the figs and dates were so uncommonly stale and hard that, had I not been starved and famished, I'd never have been able to swallow them at all."

"Oh sad to relate, the poor fellow ate
A date that was ancient and quite out of date!"

"Hold your tongue," snapped the Knight, for he was trying to think, and Peter's nonsense disturbed him. "Those packages must have been in Camy's sack when he first came to the Emerald City," he declared finally. "And now to find the Comfortable Camel!"

"Right!" cried Speedy, and Stampedro, to show his approval, reared right up on his hind legs and trumpeted with impatience.

"Will you ride?" asked the little boy, turning politely to the Knight.

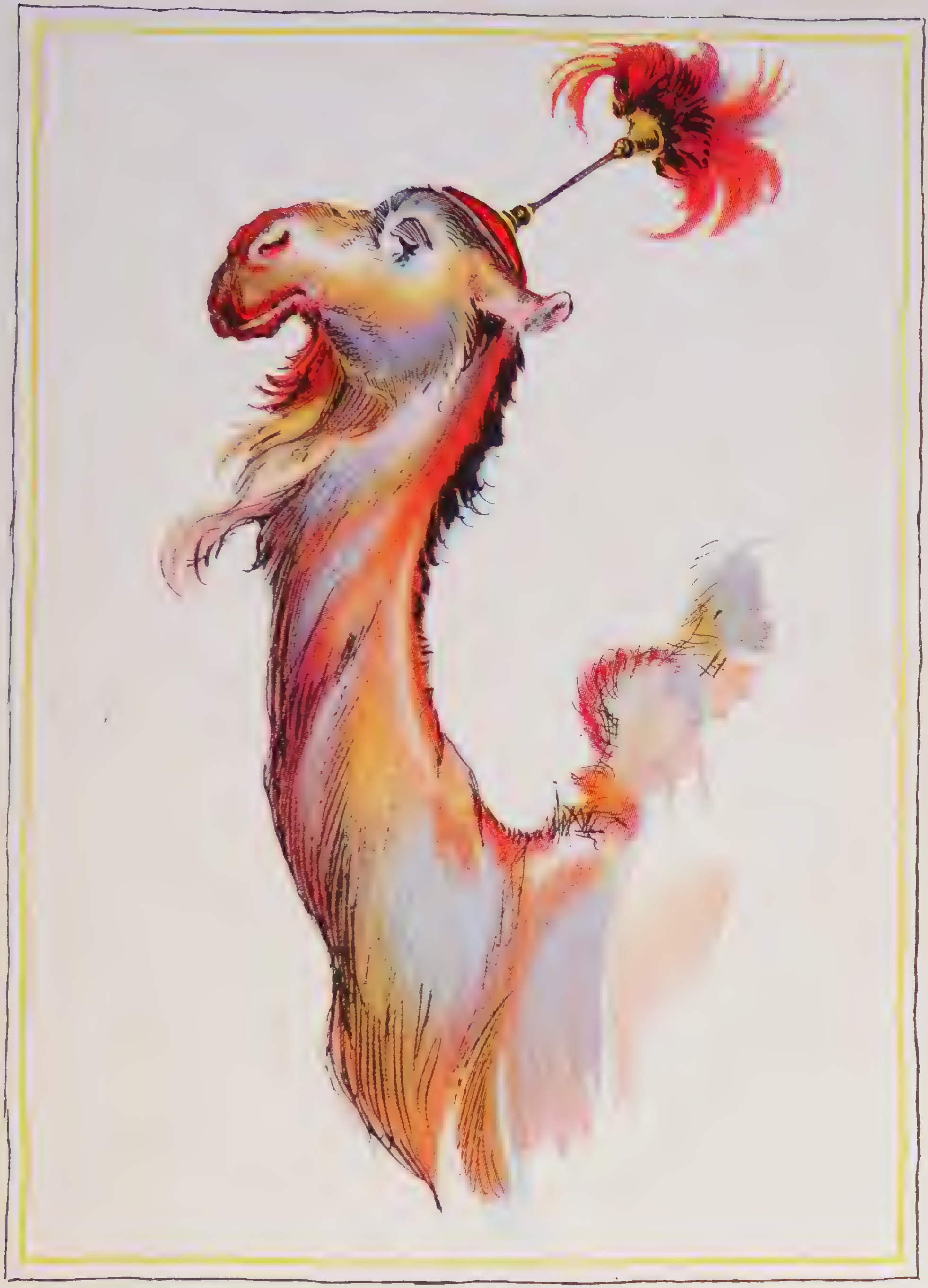
"No, no. You and Marygolden ride," answered Sir Hokus, looking longingly at the splendid horse. "Shall I lift you up, Princess?"

"Oh, don't call her Princess," begged Speedy, as Sir Hokus placed Marygolden carefully in the saddle. "She's through with all that stuff, and she's going to be plain Mary when we get back to the United States. Aren't you?" Marygolden nodded her head soberly.

"Mary, but never plain Mary," teased Peter Pun. "Why, just to look at her takes my breath away completely."

"But still you talk on," sighed Sir Hokus, taking Stampedro's bridle. "Come, my fine fellow, let's be starting." But the big chestnut planted all four feet, and shook his head stubbornly. "What now?" puffed the Knight in surprise. "Do you not wish to find your master?" Stampedro shook his head for "yes" but refused to budge an inch. Sir Hokus stepped back and looked at him questioningly.

"Mayhap he wishes me to ride," announced the



"EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON THAT CAMEL"—*Chapter 15*

jester, bouncing up like a rubber ball behind Marygolden. Stampedro, looking around, nodded his approval; but when the Knight gave the bridle another tug he still refused to move.

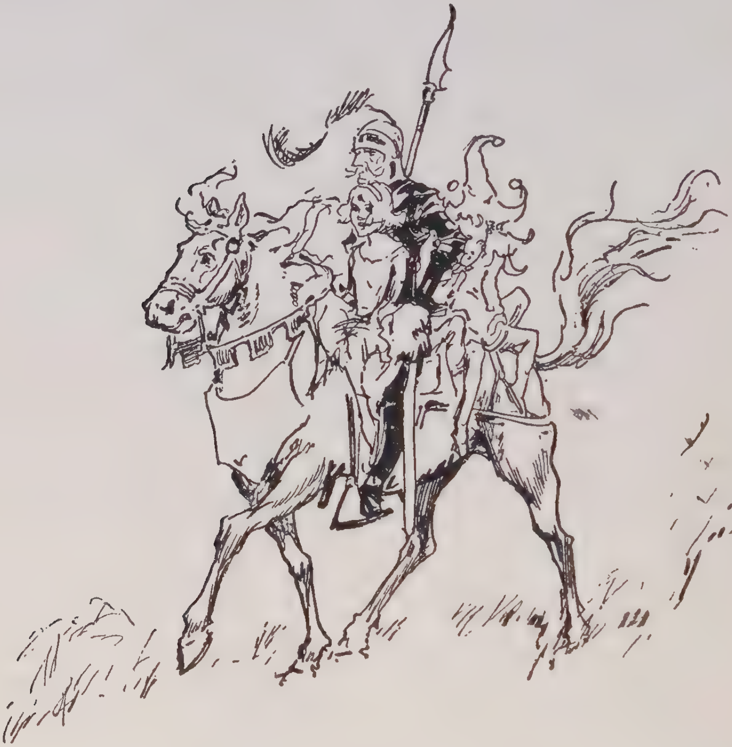
"Why, Stampedro, aren't you going to help us?" asked Speedy reproachfully. Instead of answering, the horse took Sir Hokus' mailed shirt-tail in his teeth and swung the Knight around toward the stirrup.

"He wants us all to ride," gasped Speedy. "What do you think of that?"

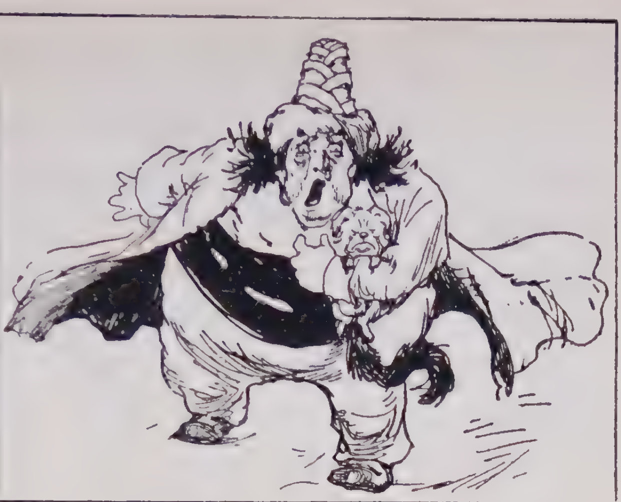
"I think it's a grand idea," said Peter Pun merrily. "We three scarce weigh as much as one. The Knight is nothing but bones and armor, and any horse in the good old days could carry two for a stretch. So mount up, Hokus, and let's be going. Let's be galloping!"

"Is that what you really want?" questioned Speedy, leaning forward to whisper in Stampedro's ear. The chestnut nodded his head vigorously, and after a little more coaxing Sir Hokus sprang into the saddle.

The Knight took Marygolden in his lap and Speedy squeezed in behind him. Peter clung to the boy's coat, perched precariously just above the horse's tail. Then, with a glance over his shoulder to assure him that everyone was settled, the great charger, like an arrow released from its bow, shot along the bank of the yellow river, his golden mane and tail streaming out like banners in the wind.



SPEEDY IN SAMANDRA



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

AND so it happened that the Sultan of Samandra, crouched sullenly on his cushioned throne, did not have long to wait for the approach of Knight. Knight was approaching by leaps and bounds. Indeed, so swiftly did the chestnut charger bear Sir Hokus and his three comrades that they came to the Sultan's city before the last of the sun's rays had faded from the sky. Catching a glimpse of the yellow boat tied up at the dock, the Knight gave a husky cheer.

"On!" cried Sir Hokus, rising in the stirrups. "On to the palace! The King of this country is the rascal we are seeking." Sparks flew from the stones as Stampedro galloped up the steep streets, and the Samandrans, noting the fierce aspect of Sir Hokus, who was swinging his battle-axe wildly round his head, fled in ever direction. Speedy and Marygolden, though shaken and breathless, could not help exclaiming at the splendor of the gold-domed buildings, and tall, spired castle; but Stampedro, without a pause, clattered up the fifty golden steps, pushed through the swinging doors, and burst like a bombshell into the magnificent throne room itself. The Sultan, hearing the great clamor without, had already risen, and when the panting steed and his four riders suddenly catapulted into his presence, he clutched Confido to his breast and with bulging eyes confronted his unexpected visitors. His first feeling was fright. Then, as he recognized the jester and war horse of a King he thought transformed and silenced forever, he gave a loud scream of anguish.

"Robbers!" shrieked the Sultan, throwing caution to the winds. "How dare you steal my magic dates and ruin my strongest enchantment?"

"Thief!" roared Sir Hokus, alighting with one bound. "How dare you steal our Comfortable Camel?" In his excitement he did not notice the difference between Tuzzle, whom he had seen on the yellow boat, and the fat ruler of the Samandrans. "R-r-restore the Comfortable Camel at once, and tell us what you have done with the King of the Golden City and all his subjects!"

"N-n-never!" shrilled the Sultan, holding Confido tight up under his chin. And pointing to first one and then another of the intruders, he began to talk in a fierce undertone to the little dog.

"Why do you talk to a dog when guests are present?" drawled Peter Pun, sliding down from Stampedro's back and snapping his fingers under the Sultan's nose. "Is that the pleasant custom in this country?"

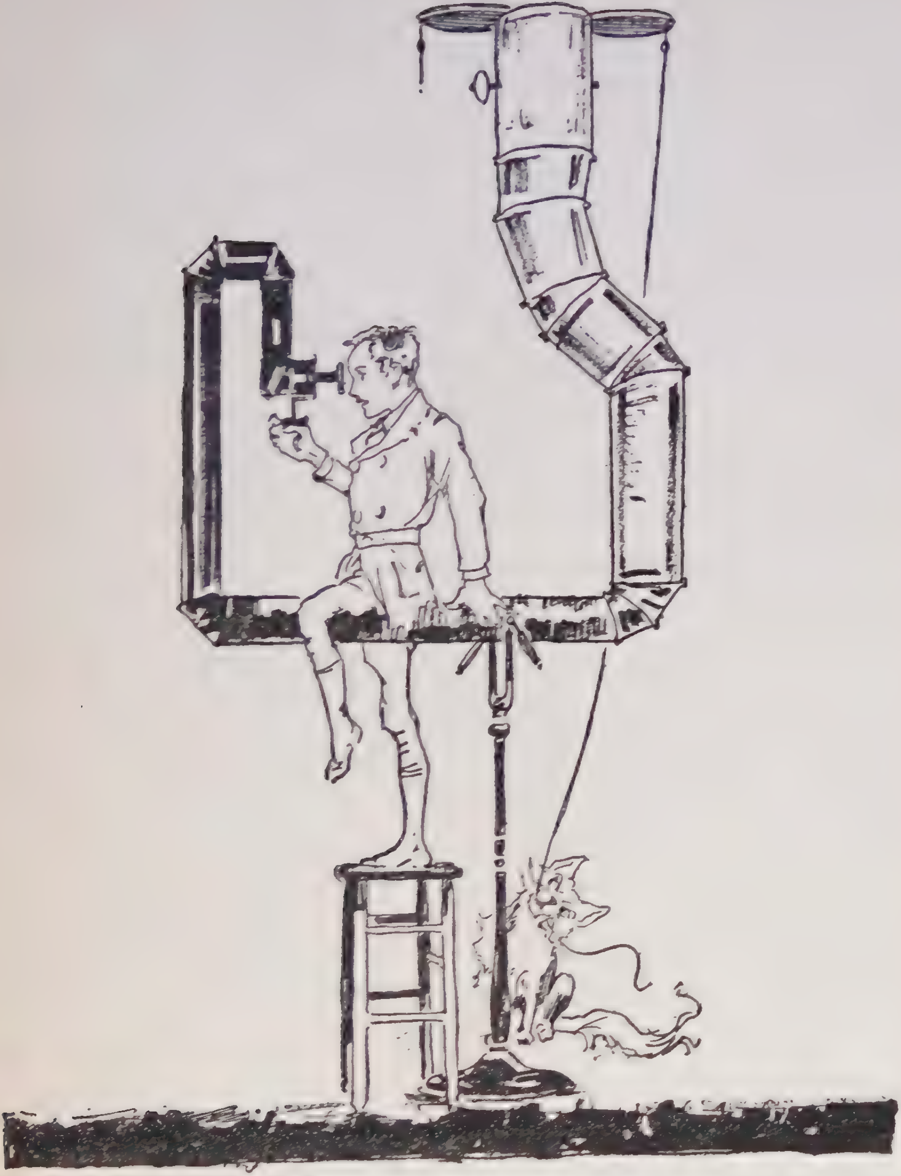
"You are a fool!" hissed the Sultan, "both by profession and nature. This is no common dog. This is Confido, the Imperial Peke of the realm. I speak to Confido because he knows all and tells nothing. Nothing, do you hear? But you, wretched plunderers, you shall tell what you have done with the magic dates, or be pounded to a powder and pulverized. Pulverized, do you understand? Tuzzle! Chinda! Blufferroo! Where is everybody?" Dropping Confido, the Sultan thumped on the golden gong beside the throne and began yelling at the top of his lungs. At this, Speedy, who had been all ears, jumped off Stampedro, and in the excitement and confusion following the arrival of the very Grand Vizier, the Grand Bozzywoz, the Grand Counter of the Imperial Spoons, and seventy Samandran spearmen, picked up Confido and tucked him quickly inside his leather jacket. Then, taking his place sturdily beside Sir Hokus, he prepared to defend himself and Marygolden.

"Seize this Knight," commanded the Sultan. "Knight—Knight?" All at once he remembered the prophecy of Chinda: *You will find part of what you seek in the middle of the night.* "This Knight has eaten the magic dates," choked the Sultan, clutching his turban desperately. "Woe is me, us, you, her, it, him, and them! Slice him in two! Slice them all in two! Seize these villains, do you hear?" The spearmen evidently heard, and they moved forward, their spears pointed menacingly. Peter Pun, in one jump, regained the back of the Yellow Knight's horse.

Marygolden, sliding forward, clasped both arms around his neck, and Stampedro, breathing fire and smoke, leapt clear over the heads of the advancing spearmen, through a side window, and away. With a gasp of relief, Speedy realized that Marygolden, at least, was safe. Sir Hokus, swinging his battle-axe, knocked down two of the spearmen in the center, and dashed through the opening before they could turn about. Speedy, seeing it was too late to follow, sprang for a spiral stair back of the throne, and tore upward three steps at a time, followed by all the spearmen except the two Sir Hokus had felled. Confido, inside his leather coat, barked and scratched, but paying no heed, the boy sped upward, up, up, up, till he grew faint and dizzy and his heart beat with loud, suffocating thumps. Reaching the top, ten steps ahead of the spearmen, Speedy rushed into a great glass-enclosed room and slammed the door. Pulling off his leather helmet he flung it on the sill, opened the window, and after a quick look round jumped into a big oak chest and closed the lid. The spearmen, panting and furious, burst into the room just as the lid settled into place. They stamped angrily about and then, catching sight of Speedy's helmet on the ledge, began sticking their heads out of the window and chattering away in the utmost excitement.

"The young monkey's jumped to the ground," puffed the leader, "and that's the end of his impudence, but we'd better go down and pick up the pieces to satisfy the Sultan. Come on!" If they had not made so much noise themselves, they might have heard Confido barking inside the oak chest, but quite satisfied that their prisoner was lying at the bottom of the tower, they clattered noisily down the spiral stair. Speedy waited until their footsteps and voices died away, then crept cautiously out of the chest. He had run, as luck would have it, to the tower room of Chinda, the Seer, and gazed in surprise and bewilderment at the magical appliances of the prophet. The Grand Bozzywoz, fortunately, was below, and tiptoeing nervously about, Speedy tried to think of some way to escape. The tall telescope that pointed skyward interested him especially, and even in the midst of his worry and anxiety he could not resist one peek.

"If we could just find that date seed and the rest of the package, everything would be easy," sighed the boy, peering absently through the long tube. "Where could it have fallen?" he worried, screwing up his eye and scarcely noticing what he was looking



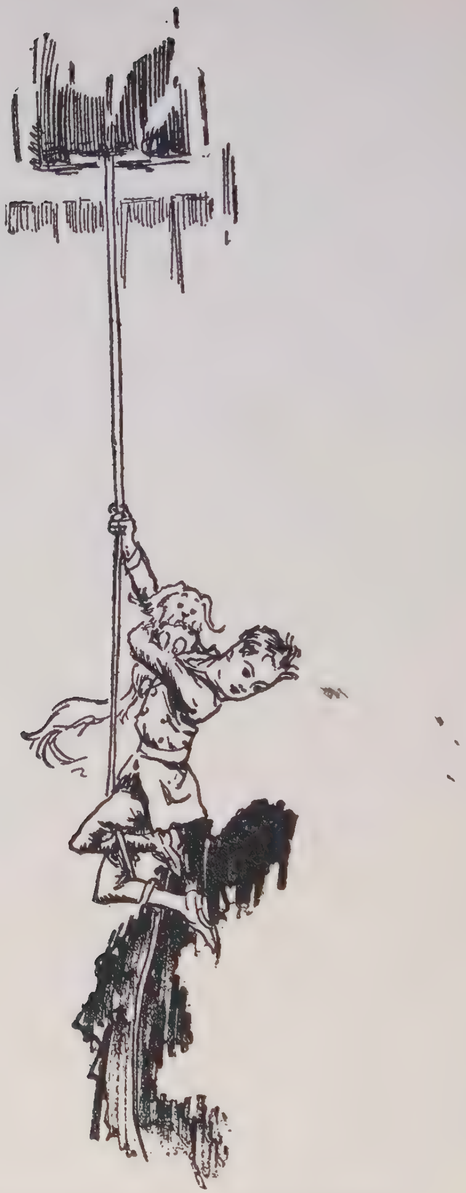
HE COULD NOT RESIST ONE PEEK

at. Then he gave a great start, for clear and distinct in the lens of the telescope he saw a bit of the enchanted forest. As he stared in fascination, it narrowed down till there was only one tree, a hollow tree he remembered seeing next to the horse chestnut. Now the lens showed the inside of the tree, and there, among a little hoard of nuts hidden away by some thrifty squirrel, Speedy saw a bright and gleaming stone.

"The date seed!" gasped Speedy, pressing his eye closer and closer as the picture faded away. "Gosh! If I can just get out of this palace and find my way back to the forest. Be quiet!" he directed, fiercely tapping the lump under his coat that was Confido. Then, relenting a little, he unbuttoned his coat and allowed the dog to stick out its head. "Can't you be still?" he pleaded earnestly. "Nothing's going to happen to you." With a little whimper, the Peke stopped barking and fixed its bulging, near-sighted eyes anxiously on the boy. "There, that's the fellow." Giving him a hasty pat, Speedy looked out the window to see how far it was to the ground, for it would never do to risk the spiral stair. With a shiver he drew in his head, and as he did, the heavy boots and rough voices of the spearmen came echoing upward.

Not finding him senseless in the garden, they were coming back to search the tower. Trembling between the chest and the window, Speedy's glance flew round the prophet's workshop and came frantically to rest on a coil of rope hanging on a hook near the door. Snatching the rope he regained the window and tied the rope to a hook on the sill.

"Curses!" puffed Speedy, tossing the rope over the edge. "Curses, Mickonionjuice! Here they are!" Dropping over the ledge, Speedy began his perilous downward descent hand over hand. He dared not look up nor down, and as he was wondering whether the rope would be long enough to reach to the bottom of the tower, it fell in a dozen stinging coils upon his head. A spearman, looking out of the window, had cut it with his scimiter, and like a log Speedy fell into the garden. Luckily he was only a few feet from the ground and though somewhat jarred and shocked, he jumped immediately to his feet and started to run. In the right direction, too, fortunately, and before the spearmen in the tower could give the alarm he had reached the dock and was scampering along the bank of the yellow river. "If I follow the river," he panted, "I'll get back to the forest. Then I'll find that date seed and try to find



SPEEDY BEGAN HIS PERILOUS DESCENT

the others. Whew!" Steadying Confido with one hand, he flew along faster than he had ever run in the track events at home and soon had the satisfaction of hearing the voices of his pursuers grow fainter and fainter. As he paused at length to catch his breath, a great shadow moved silently out from the trees, a soft nose was thrust suddenly into his hand and two glad cries rang through the dusk. It was the horse of the Yellow Knight, and leaning down with eager hands to help him up, Marygolden and Peter Pun.

"I knew you'd get away from that old scalawag," chuckled the jester. "We've been watching for you. Seen Hokus since he pokused the spearmen?"

"No," admitted Speedy, settling with a tired groan into the saddle between his two friends. "But I know where the magic date seed is hidden!"

"You do!" cried Peter, and Marygolden looked at him in round-eyed admiration, while Stampedro pricked up both ears and began to prance sideways.

"Uh-huh!" wheezed Speedy, still out of breath from his long run. "Do you think you could carry us back to your horse chestnut tree, Stampedro?" The horse hastily shook his head for "yes," and as Speedy, between jounces and bounces, told all that had happened, he galloped headlong through the Sultan's orange groves away toward the enchanted forest of Oz.

"Wasn't it lucky I happened to mention the date seed while I was looking through that magic telescope? Won't Sir Hokus be surprised? Curses! I hope the Sultan hasn't caught him, though."

"Yon Knight knows his Sultans, never fear. But why have you brought the Sultan's dog?" inquired Peter, looking inquisitively at Confido, whom he now spied for the first time.

"That," smiled Speedy mysteriously, "is my secret."

"But isn't he perfectly precious? Can I hold him?" begged Marygolden, turning round to have a better view.

"Yes, but hold him tight," cautioned Speedy, and bade Stampedro stop while he transferred the little dog to Marygolden's arms. "He's a girl's dog anyway," he announced condescendingly, "and you can have him if you wish."

"Oh, Speedy!" Hugging Confido with one arm and putting the other around Speedy to keep from falling off, Marygolden fairly squealed with delight, and Stampedro, with an impatient snort, bounded forward. Dusk had deepened into night, and long afterward Speedy remembered that thrilling gallop through the shadowy forest with only the faint moonlight and an occasional star to show them a path between the trees. But Stampedro, without one false turn or unnecessary step, brought them at last to the great horse chestnut tree.

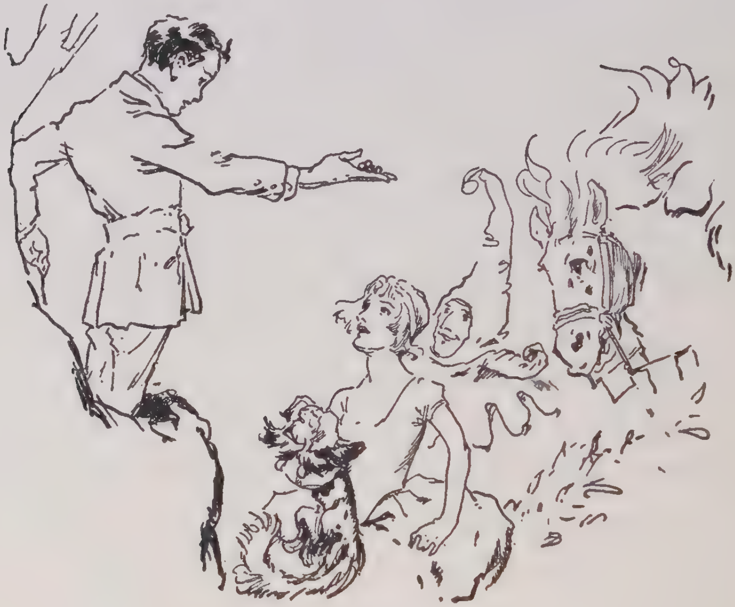
"Here we are! And better still, I can talk again," he cried, shaking his head until all the gold tassels on his armor danced in the wind.

"Hurray!" shouted Speedy. "That's more like!" And patting Stampedro's curving neck, he slid to the ground and hurried over to the hollow tree.

"Will'st alight, maiden?" said Peter Pun, tumbling after Speedy, and reaching up to help Marygolden. "Will'st alight in the dark, and shed the radiance of your beauty upon the gloomy scene?" Marygolden laughingly gave Peter her hand, and soon all three were peering into the hollow tree. Speedy, on his hands and knees, was feeling around with his flashlight for the magic stone.

"It's here!" he cried, springing up so suddenly that he bumped his head. "It's here, and here it is!" Stepping out of the hollow tree, he placed the shining yellow stone in the palm of his hand and held it out to the others. Stampedro, who had dropped to his knees so that he could see into the tree better, bounded up with an excited little whinny.

"Well, now that we have it, what shall we do with it, Smallfellow?"



"Why, all we have to do is touch all the people who are enchanted," explained Peter Pun, hopping round and round on one foot. "Touch that oak behind you, Speedy. I swear it winked at me just now."

"But we can't go through the whole forest touching trees," objected Speedy. "Besides, we might miss some."

"Well, what are we going to do?" asked the jester impatiently.

"That's up to Confido," announced Speedy calmly. "Didn't you hear the Sultan say to-day that Confido knew everything? Like as not he knows the secret of all these transformations. That's why I brought him along, for now he can talk as well as listen, and tell us all he knows."

"By the ears of my mother's cow!" sputtered Peter Pun, staring admiringly at Speedy. "You're a quick one!" Shrugging his shoulders carelessly but secretly thinking Peter was right, Speedy now turned to Confido.

"Will you tell us how we can release the King of the Golden City and his subjects?" he asked coaxingly. "Surely you do not want them to be imprisoned in this forest forever. Will you tell us how the Sultan's evil spell may be broken?"

"Woof!" barked the little dog sulkily. "Woof! Woof!"

"Why, he cannot talk at all!" wailed Peter Pun, in bitter disappointment.

"Oh, yes he can," insisted Speedy. "He just won't."

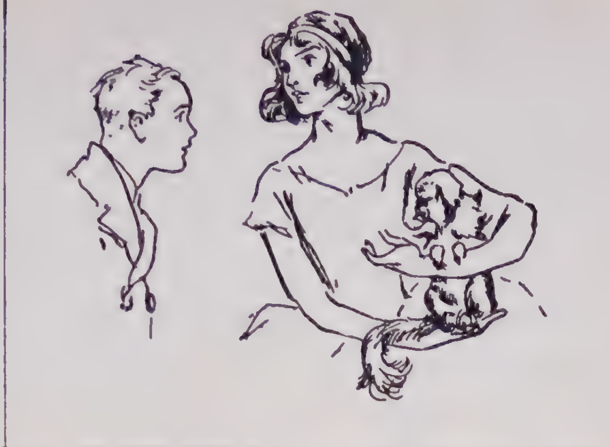
"Speak, dog, or I'll flatten you under my foot!" trumpeted Stampedro, flashing his great eyes at the proud little Peke.

"Let me ask him?" begged Marygolden, as Peter and Speedy reached angrily for the Imperial Puppy.

"Darling," crooned the Princess, "you're going to be mine forever, and never have to listen to that savage old Sultan again. You shall have as many saucers of cream and chicken hearts as you wish and do just as you want, always. Couldn't you tell *me* the little secret of the magic dates?" Cuddling the little dog under her chin, Marygolden looked pleadingly into his eyes. Now if there was one dish Confido relished above all others it was chicken hearts. Then, too, he had grown terribly tired of the whispering old Sultan and his eternal secrets; and now that he was to belong to this pretty girl, he decided there would be no harm in telling all he knew.

"Yes, I could tell you," drawled the little dog in his condescending voice, "for I perceive that you are of royal blood. But these others——!" Sneezing violently to show his contempt for Peter and Speedy, Confido climbed on Marygolden's shoulder and whispered five words in her left ear.

THE RESTORATION OF CORUMBIA



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"WHAT did he say?" begged Speedy, hurrying up to the Princess.

"First plant the date seed!" Solemnly Marygolden repeated the little dog's instructions.

"That's easy enough," observed Speedy, and taking out his knife cut a small hole in the ground and dropped the yellow stone in. Covering the stone with earth, he jumped up expectantly. "What next?" Confido looked coldly through the boy and again whispered confidingly to Marygolden.

"Pluck the six dates when they grow," directed the Princess, "for if any of the magic dates are lost, all will be restored by planting the seed of any one of them." A little patch of moonlight fell on the spot where the five watchers stood waiting for the magic seed to sprout. Speedy, growing impatient, took out his flashlight and knelt directly over the raised mound of earth. Before he could straighten up, there came a rip, tear, and rustle, and as Peter, Marygolden, and Stampedro started back, the heavy fronded head of a date palm, followed by the straight stout trunk of the tree itself, burst through the soil, and catching Speedy on the top shot up, up, and out of sight. In vain they all tried to catch a glimpse of their adventurous young comrade, but it was no use, for the palm soared above the tallest oaks in the forest.

"Now see what you've done!" panted Stampedro, glaring at Confido, but Peter Pun held up his hand warningly.

"Hark!" whispered the jester softly. "Hark! Troubles never come singly. Methinks we are pursued." True enough, heavy steps came thudding toward them, and the snap and crackle of twigs brushed by some heavy body.

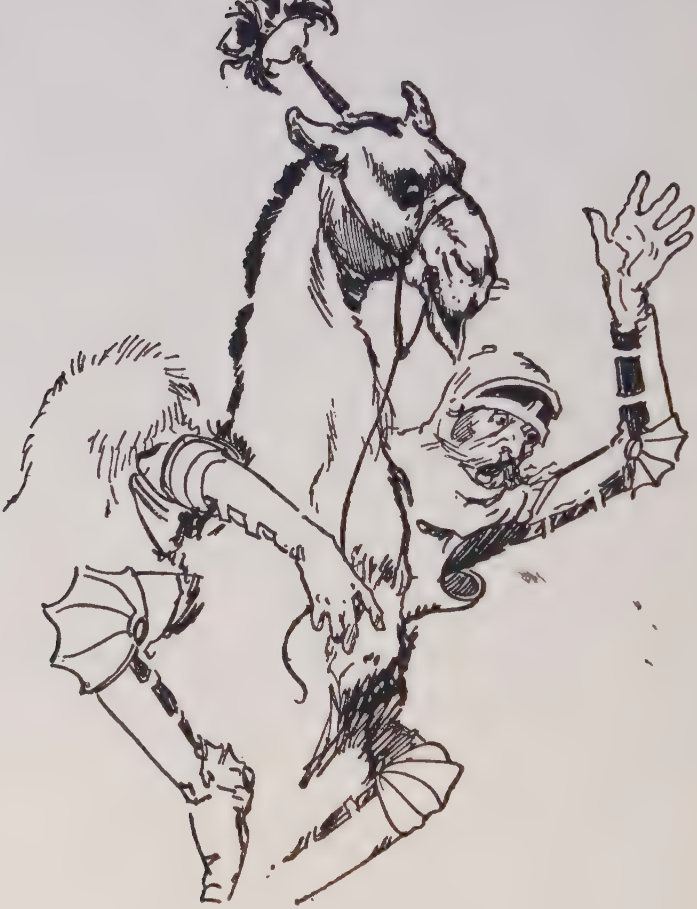
"Mount up! Mount up and we'll be off!" wheezed the Yellow Knight's horse. "'Tis the Sultan, no doubt, and all his men! Up with you! Up with you!"

"And leave Speedy here all by himself?" wailed Marygolden, putting both arms round the palm tree.

"Let us not fly until we see what manner of creature pursues," murmured Peter, peering fearfully into the shadows. "Hah, 'tis a camel," he continued, as a long neck was thrust into the rim of moonlight, "a camel, and like as not the Sultan."

"It's Sir Hokus!" trilled Marygolden. "It's our very own Good Knight of Oz."

"What ho, everybody! Everybody, what HO!" blustered Sir Hokus, as Camy, with a great rattling and tossing of saddle sacks, trotted into the circle around the palm tree. "And what dost thou here? All the way from the Sultan's castle I've followed the tracks of Stampedro, and at last I have found you all." With a weary sigh, he looked from one to the other. Then, suddenly missing Speedy, he peered anxiously over the Camel's hump. "Where's the boy?" he asked sharply. Without answering they pointed



"What ho, everybody!"

up at the palm tree. Then Marygolden and Peter together told how Speedy had escaped from Samandra, had cleverly stolen Confido and had discovered the whereabouts of the magic date seed and, following the little dog's directions, had been carried aloft with the magic palm.

"How now, and we'll soon end this," grunted Sir Hokus, and tumbling without ceremony off Camy's back, he lifted his battle-axe. "I'll fell this monstrous tree."

"Stop! Stop! That were indeed a fell deed.
If he fell all that way,
He'd be smashed, 'lack-a-day!"

"If you take *my* advice," yawned the little dog, curling up more cozily in Marygolden's arms, "you'll do nothing." This brought a burst of indignation from Speedy's comrades, but as they stood arguing, the palm tree began to grow down, sliding silently into the earth like a great greased pole. As the leaves at the top came into view, and before they touched the ground, Speedy leapt from the center and the palm leaves were instantly swallowed up in the earth.

"I've got them," panted the boy, triumphantly waving a bunch of ripe dates. "All six! Say, when did you come?" Rushing over to Sir Hokus, he clapped him joyfully on the back. "Say, now that we're all together nothing can molest us again!"

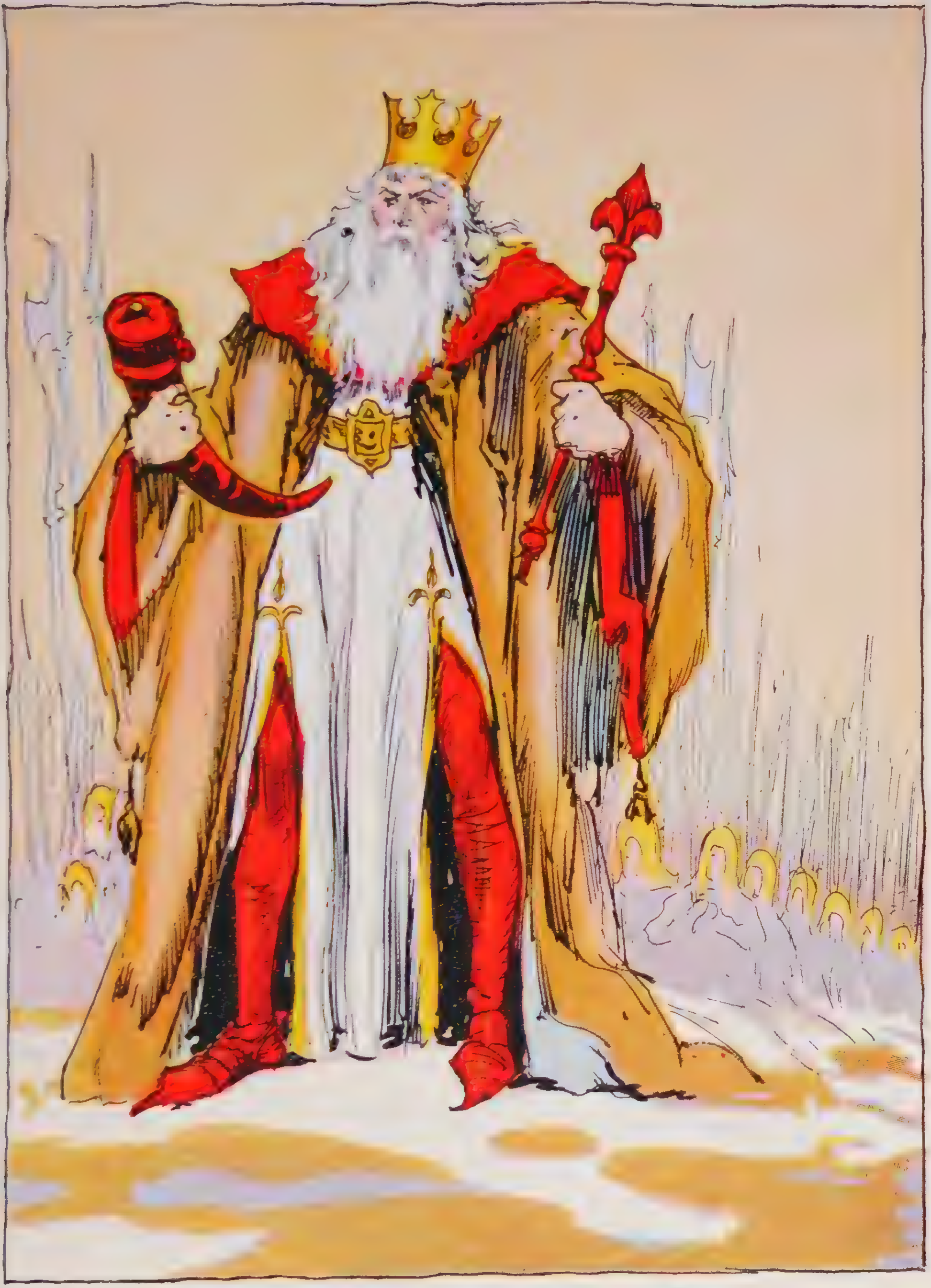
"Right!" boomed Sir Hokus. "And with a lad like yourself to help, we'll soon have the King in his castle. A clever move to bring the little dog. Odds bodikens! You'll be knighted for this!"

"But what happened to you?" breathed Speedy. "And is this really the Comfortable Camel of Oz?"

"At your service," mumbled Camy, beginning to nibble at the twigs and smiling kindly between mouthfuls as Sir Hokus introduced Speedy, Marygolden, and Stampedro. "But I hope never to find myself in Samandra again. What a dumb place, and what a place to be dumb!"

"I agree with you," whinnied Stampedro, pawing the earth at the very thought. "But tell us, Sir Knight, how you came off so successfully."

"Easily enough," exclaimed Sir Hokus, leaning heavily on his lance. "Guided by my nose, which has ever been as keen as my sword, I soon located the Sultan's Camel Quarters. Knocking Samandrans right and left" (he gave a little pantomime of just how this had been done) "I called loudly for Camy, who immediately answered my hail. Though he



IT SEEMED LIKE SOME BEWILDERING DREAM —*Chapter 17*

could not talk I recognized his voice and soon had him loose. Then I headed straight for this forest, picking up the footprints of Stampedro soon after I left the castle, and came hot-foot after you."

"You mean I came hot-foot," chuckled the Comfortable Camel, winking at Peter Pun.

"Have it your own way," smiled Sir Hokus. "But here we all are, and now that we have the magic dates, let us proceed with the disenchantment of this King and his subjects. Then if yon villainous Sultan rides after us, there'll be plenty of good men to fight."

"That's an idea," breathed Speedy. "I forgot about the Sultan. Now tell us, Confido, what do we do next?"

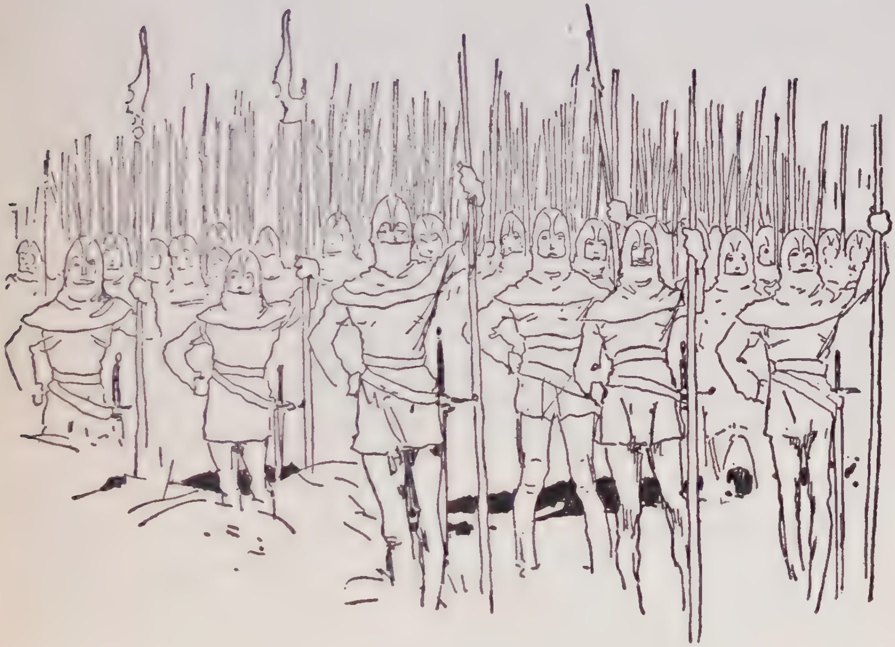
"It's long past my bedtime," sniffed the pampered little Peke. "I don't see any cushions to sleep on, and why should I bother my head about this silly King and his subjects? He never did anything for me!" At this heartless speech Stampedro put back his ears, showed all his teeth, and had to be held by Sir Hokus to keep him from biting a piece out of the Imperial Puppy. And though Speedy and Peter Pun coaxed and commanded, Confido answered all their questions with yawns, and finally closing his eyes pretended to snore. Then Marygolden, giving him a little shake, began to whisper in his ear.

"This King will no doubt reward you handsomely," promised the Princess recklessly. "He'll give you golden bowls, and collars, and anything you wish, if you release him from this cruel enchantment."

"That's so," muttered Confido, opening his eyes and wriggling his nose. "I hadn't thought of that. And since *you* have asked me, Princess, here goes. Take the smallest date," he directed, in his insolent little voice, "eat the date and bury the seed as you did before."

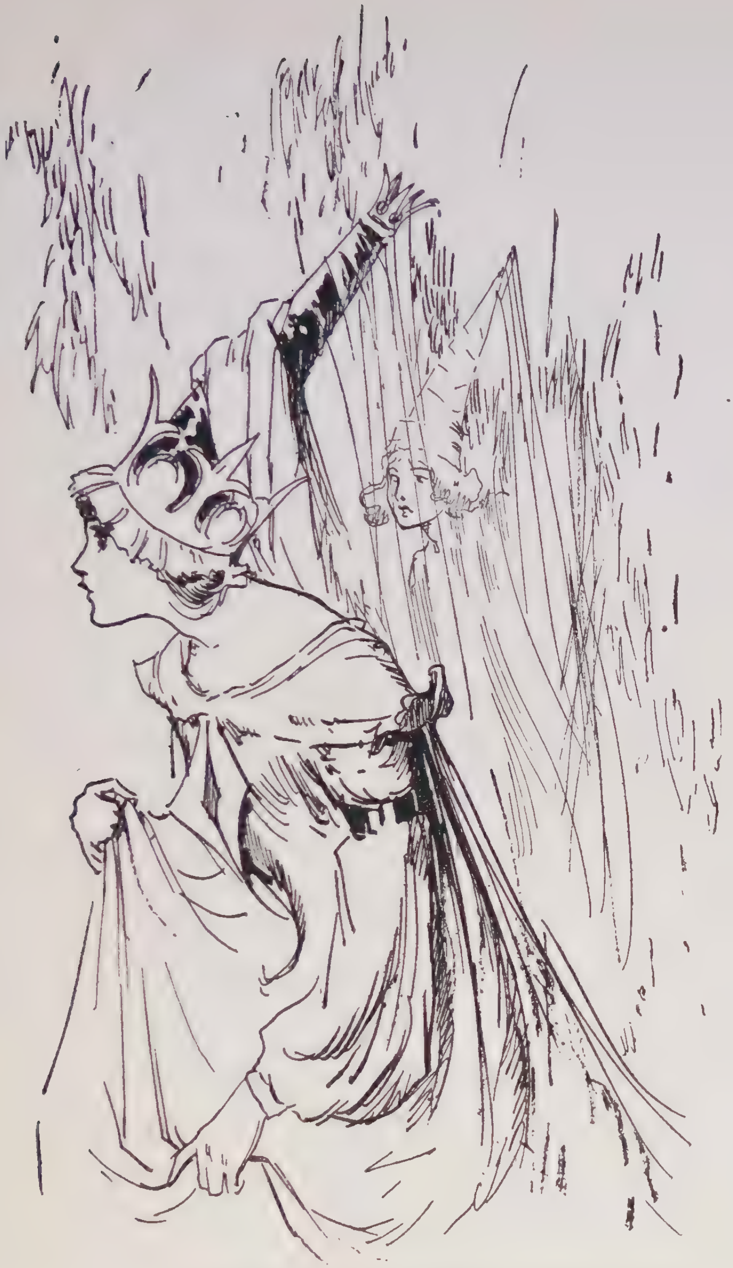
"What?" cried Speedy impatiently. "All that to do over again?" Confido nodded. Speedy was not at all fond of ripe dates, but he was so curious to see what would happen that he swallowed it down without a murmur and buried the seed, this time a brilliant red stone, beneath a tall oak. Then, breathless and expectant, the little company of rescuers stood back to watch and listen.

Of all his wonderful experiences, Speedy remembered the scene in the enchanted forest best. It seemed, while it was happening, like some strange, bewildering dream. For suddenly the murmur and whisper of the leaves became the murmur and whisper of many voices. The great oak dwindled and changed to a King so tall, straight, and handsome that a little cry of admiration burst from Speedy's lips. Oaks and pines all around them melted into Knights, hale, hearty, and splendid, with gleaming lances and shining armor. From the horse chestnut trees, stamping, prancing steeds charged in a glittering array, tossing their heads, whinnying, neighing, and calling joyfully for their riders. Stampedro was



off in an instant, bounding here and there among the Knights, but finding nowhere the one he was seeking. Saplings, while Speedy and Marygolden gasped and marvelled, became laughing troops of merry children, old bent trees turned into councillors and wise men of the Court. Bushes became pages and seneschals bearing flaming torches. The willows by the river were the Queen and her ladies, in great green ruffs like Marygolden had worn, in velvet and lace and the long trailing dresses of long ago. One would have thought that not a tree would remain standing in the whole forest, but the enchanted ones were hardly missed. A sage bush became a sage, in fact. The lyre bush that had so puzzled Sir Hokus, was the King's minstrel, and striking his small harp he began instantly to sing. The trumpet vines became trumpeters, and while the little band of adventurers gazed in rapture and delight, the King found the Queen, and putting his arm around her, raised his hand for silence.

"Corumbians!" cried the King in his grave, deep voice. "By some unexplained miracle we have been released from our wearisome enchantment. Is my son, the Yellow Knight of Oz in this company?" There was a tense silence and everyone looked expectantly



THE WILLOWS WERE THE QUEEN AND HER LADIES around, but the Yellow Knight neither spoke nor answered.

"I know," cried the Queen, suddenly clapping her hands. "The Prince awaits us in the castle!"

"To the castle! On to the castle!" roared the Corumbians, swarming round their Majesties.

"All the King's horses and all the King's men,
And all the King's court are together again!"

mused Peter Pun, and breaking away from Sir Hokus and Speedy, he hurried over to the King and flung both arms about his knees. The King seemed as rejoiced to see Peter as the jester was to see him, and lifting him up embraced him heartily. Then Peter, for the moment serious and strangely dignified, turned from the King and called loudly. "Under yonder oak stand the liberators of us all: Speedy, a boy from far-off America, Sir Hokus of Pokes from the Emerald City, an enchanted Princess, the Comfortable Camel of Oz, and our own Stampedro!"

"Don't forget me," barked Confido temperishly. "I'm about the most important person here!" But in the cheering and confusion following Peter's announcement, no one even heard the little dog. Marygolden, Speedy, and Sir Hokus were tossed up on the shoulders of the crowd and borne triumphantly to the Golden Castle. Two Knights led Camy, and two more walked beside Stampedro, and the flare of the torches, the blare of the trumpets, and neighing of the war horses made it a noisy and memorable march. As they entered the tumble-down and ruined courtyard, the page boys on the tower again blew upon their golden horns.

"The salute to my son!" exclaimed the King of Corumbia breathlessly. "My son, the Yellow Knight, must be somewhere near." Scarcely noting the ruin and decay in his palace, the King rushed inside. A little silence fell upon the company as by the light of the torches they looked upon the wild and weedy castle. Softly the Queen began to weep, hiding her face in her long green veil. Seeing this, Speedy slid quickly from the shoulder of the Knight who carried him.

"The same magic that restored your Majesty and your Majesty's subjects will restore the castle," he assured the Queen eagerly.

"Yes, tell us what to do now, Confido," begged Marygolden from her high perch on another Knight's shoulder. "This small dog knows the secret of all the Sultan's enchantments," the Princess told them seriously, "and is going to help restore the castle."

"Hola, for the Sultan's dog!" roared the Knights and courtiers, and cheered so loud and long that Confido felt that at last he was being properly valued and appreciated. And this time, without even waiting to be coaxed, he told what was to be done.

"Let the King of Corumbia eat the smallest date on the stalk. Let a fire be kindled in the dining hall and the seed of the date cast into the fire," directed Confido, waving his paw commandingly. The King, by this time convinced that his son was not in the castle, had returned, and quickly followed the little dog's instructions. A fire was kindled by the servants

in the great dining hall, and as the date seed fell upon the flames there came a crackling and trembling throughout the whole castle! Before the eyes of the assembled courtiers and Knights, the walls straightened, tapestries became shining and bright, rugs soft and whole. Flowers appeared in the vases, and the long oak table running down the center of the tall hall suddenly groaned under the weight of silver, china and a hundred tempting viands. From the kitchens came the odor of roasting meats and browning tarts. Everything was in a moment exactly as it had been five hundred years before, when the Sultan had cast his wicked spell over Corumbia. With a cry of pleasure and delight, the Queen seized Speedy's hand.

"And now, gracious youth!" begged her Majesty. "Restore my son, and no more will I ever ask of thee."

"Bring back the Yellow Knight!" trumpeted Stampedro, who had trotted into the palace and was standing with Camy beside the King. "I can no longer endure this separation." Speedy, as anxious as anyone to see this long missing Prince, turned quickly to Confido, but this time Confido regretfully shook his head.

"The King's son cannot be disenchanted until morning! When the castle clocks strike ten, the Queen must eat the smallest of the remaining dates and fling the seed from the tallest tower. Then, and then only, will the King's son return."

"Are you sure he will be safely restored to us?" asked the Queen.

"As sure as I am of the reward I will receive from your gracious Majesties," murmured Confido, rolling his round little eyes at the King and his Royal Consort. Speedy and Peter exchanged amused glances at Confido's speech, but the King, after earnestly assuring the little dog of his willingness to bestow upon him anything whatsoever he desired, raised his right hand for silence.

"As we must wait until morning before the last and final enchantment can be broken, let us feast and be merry while we wait. But first, let a guard be set around the castle, lest that rascally Sultan attack us in the night. These travellers," the King waved graciously in the direction of Speedy and his comrades, "these travellers have come a long way and have grown weary and hungry in our service. Let us refresh and entertain them and hear from their own lips the strange adventures which brought about our miraculous release."

Chapter Seventeen

" 'Tis a merry tale and wags like a donkey's ears," said the jester, shaking his belled stick gaily. "Tell them, Speedy, all that has happened to you and to us since you fell in the Skyrocket to Subterranea and discovered the Princess made of gold. And tell them, Sir Knight, all that happened since you set forth upon your quest and came into the enchanted forest yonder."

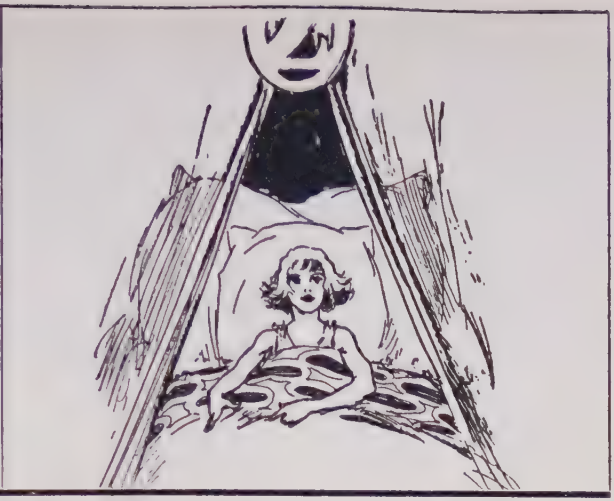
"Nay! Nay! First let them eat and rest!" And moving toward the head of the long oak table, the King placed Speedy on his right, Sir Hokus on his left, and Marygolden beside the Queen. Stampedro and Camy had golden tables piled with ripe apples and crisp carrots, and Confido was given a golden bowl of cream and chicken hearts, and never in his proudest days in Samandra had the little dog been so fussed over and petted. When at last Speedy could eat no more, and the whole merry company could tuck away not even one more tart, the boy and Sir Hokus related their strange experiences and adventures. The Corumbians listened spellbound, and could one blame them? After questions, exclamations and praise enough to satisfy even Confido, the travellers expressed a desire for bed. So the King, calling loudly for lights, himself conducted them to the Royal

Guest Chambers, and bade them an affectionate goodnight. Marygolden and Confido had a little yellow room next to the Queen's own chamber. Sir Hokus and Speedy had a whole apartment in the tower, and Camy and Stampedro spent the night in the courtyard, exchanging strange experiences and boasting of their respective masters.

"I wonder," sighed Speedy, giving his pillow a final thump, "why there are four dates left instead of three. It will take only one to restore the Yellow Knight. What about those others?" (I've been wondering that very thing myself, haven't you?)

"I trust," wheezed Sir Hokus, just before he dozed off, "I trust that rascally Sultan will ride this way. There's nothing I should like better than a raging battle, in which I shall give myself the pleasure of tweaking his nose! Odds tarts and turnips! His NOSE!"

THE RETURN OF THE YELLOW KNIGHT



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"THIS is the day we're going to see the Yellow Knight, Confido. Aren't you excited?" Marygolden hopped out of her canopied bed and fairly danced into the ruffled robe and flowered silk dress the Queen's lady in waiting had brought in to her.

"Knights, yellow or red, mean nothing to me," yawned the little dog, rolling over lazily. "But I do wonder what the Sultan is doing by this time. I'll wager the old bore misses me like fury."

"Why bother about him?" said Marygolden, combing her yellow curls briskly. "You belong to me, now. We're going to America and you need never return to Samandra at all. Don't you like me a little bit, Confido?"

"Well, rather," admitted the little dog cautiously. "But you must carry me every place you go and see that I have plenty of cream and chicken."

"All right," agreed Marygolden goodnaturedly. "But come on, let's see what Speedy and Sir Hokus are doing." Tucking the Peke under her arm, Marygolden ran gaily down to the courtyard. Speedy and the Knight had been up for hours, and seated on a gold bench near a sparkling fountain were discussing the possibility of a surprise attack by the Sultan, and the probable uses of the remaining dates. It was astonishing to see the castle that but yesterday had lain so dusty and lifeless now bustling with sound and activity. Gardeners in quaint green coats were clipping the early roses, pages and footmen stepped importantly about, and everything was going on exactly as it had done five hundred years before, when the Sultan's transformations had taken place.

Chapter Eighteen

"Well," mused Speedy, waving cheerfully to Marygolden, "as soon as the Yellow Knight is restored, we'd better be heading for the Emerald City. It's great fun here, but Uncle Billy must be dreadfully worried by this time, and I ought to be getting back. I'll certainly miss you and Peter and Stampedro, but there'll be Marygolden to remind me of Oz."

"And a mighty sweet reminder," smiled Sir Hokus, rising gallantly as the little Princess dropped on the bench beside them. "Didst rest well, maiden?"

"Yes, indeed," said Marygolden, ruffling up Confido's soft fur. "But I can hardly wait to see the Yellow Knight. Is it almost time, Sir Hokus?"

"Just one hour to ten," answered Sir Hokus, squinting up at the great clock on the tower. "Canst wait that long, Princess?"

"Lords and Ladies now awaken,
Come to breakfast, buns and bacon,
Tarts and toast! What ho! What hey!
Will ye tarry here all day?"

shouted Peter Pun, cartwheeling up to the bench.

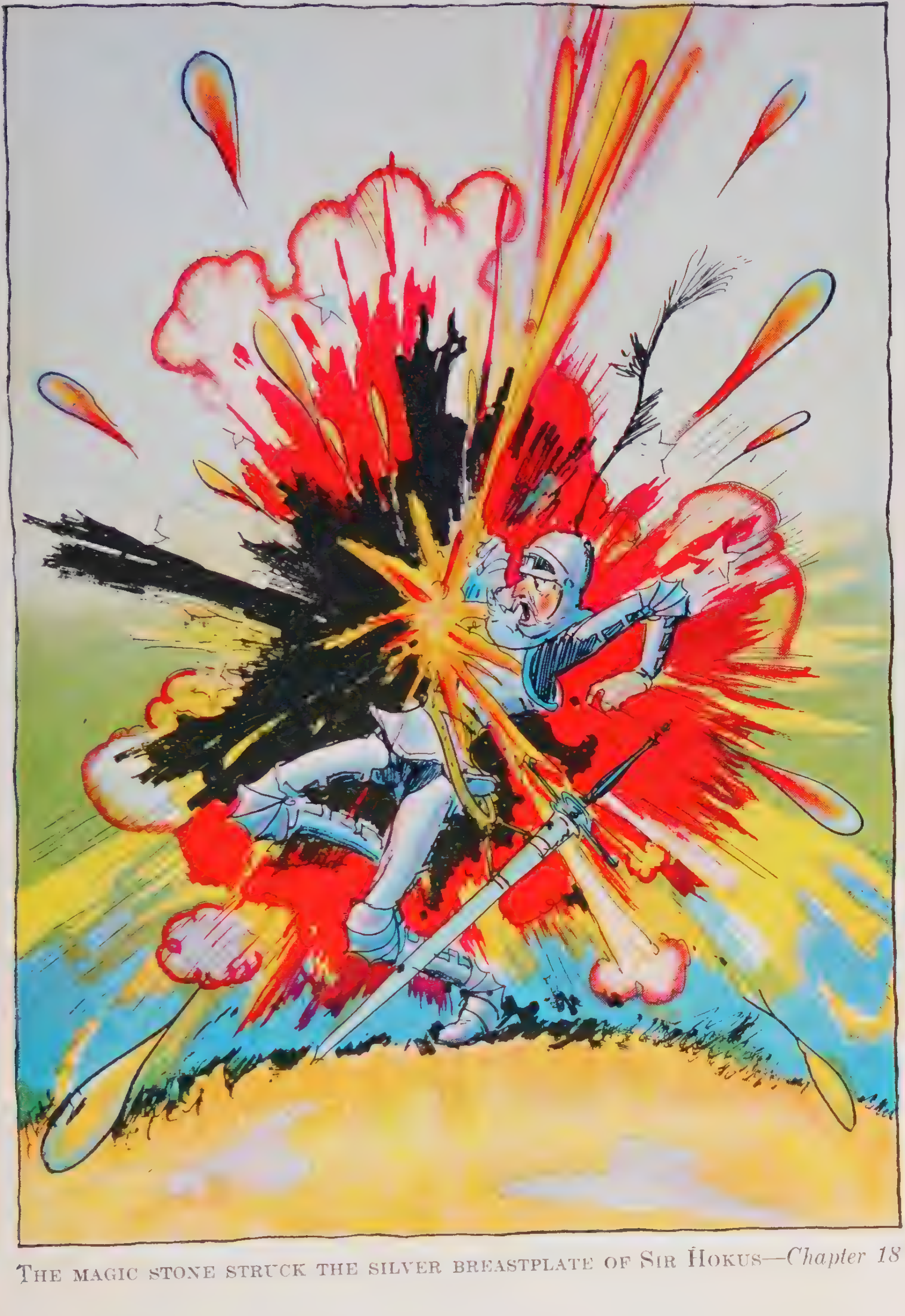
"Let's go now, while the bacon's hot," wheezed Confido, scratching Marygolden on the arm. "And don't forget my bowl of cream. Is there plenty of cream—thick, yellow cream, person?"

"Barrels," Peter assured him gravely. "Cream for the Imperial Houndling!" called the jester, capering ahead of the visitors. "Cream in cups, saucers, and pudding bowls!" Breakfast, in spite of the anxiety of the King and Queen of Corumbia to see their son, was a sumptuous and merry affair. Speedy, his plate heaped with roast wild fowl, crisp buns, and fresh strawberry tarts, with a footman behind his chair to anticipate his slightest wish, reflected that there would be many times when he would miss all this castle and king stuff. The King, himself, was bubbling over with jollity, joking every other minute with Peter Pun; but the Queen scarcely ate a mouthful, and kept glancing nervously at the clock over the mantel. At ten minutes of the hour she could endure the suspense no longer.

"Are you sure it was ten and not before?" she asked, looking anxiously at Confido, who was lapping up his fifth bowl of cream.

"Quite sure," answered the Sultan's dog calmly. "But since your Highness must ascend to the tallest tower, perhaps you had better start ascending."

"Here's the date," said Speedy, handing the smallest one on the bunch to the Queen. "I'm going out into the courtyard with Stampedro," he cried, push-



THE MAGIC STONE STRUCK THE SILVER BREASTPLATE OF SIR HOKUS—*Chapter 18*

ing back his chair. "Come on, Marygolden! Come on, Sir Hokus! Come on, Peter!" Followed by half the courtiers and servants, the three hurried out of the castle, and presently they gave a loud cheer, for high above their heads on the balcony of the castle's tallest tower, stood the King and Queen. Stampedro had been waiting for this hour since dawn, and fairly pranced with restlessness and impatience. As the golden bells in the tower started musically to toll, every face turned upward. Speedy and Marygolden, close to the Yellow Knight's charger, clasped hands nervously, and Sir Hokus, who held Stampedro's bridle, snatched off his helmet the better to see this long lost Prince of Corumbia. As the tenth stroke pealed from the tower, the Queen, who had already eaten the date, tossed the magic stone over the balcony rail. Like a falling star it sped downward, struck the silver breastplate of Sir Hokus of Pokes, and shivered into a hundred glittering fragments. The crowd, in a stupefied silence, stared at the Knight, when three shrill blasts sounded from the trumpets of the golden page boys on the top of the tower.

"This," called the first, in a clear ringing voice, "this is Corum——"

"Prince of Corumbia!" cried the second page.

"And the Yellow Knight of Oz!" finished the third, and raising their trumpets together the pages blew one long, piercing blast. Then they stiffened into silence and were still. And where, now, was Sir Hokus of Pokes, the kind, friendly, gray old Knight of Oz? Speedy, with a queer sinking in his heart, rubbed his eyes and stared again. Standing at Stampedro's head was a sturdy young Knight with shining gold hair. A yellow plume rose from his gold helmet, and a yellow cloak floated from his broad shoulders. His eyes, blue and sparkling, looked impatiently over the crowd, which had broken into the wildest cheering and stamping. Feeling terribly confused and friendless, Marygolden and Speedy moved closer together, while the Comfortable Camel gave a groan of dismay. Without seeming to know or notice them, the Yellow Knight flung his arms round Stampedro's neck, and the great horse nickered and whinnied with joy. Waiting just long enough to embrace the King and Queen, who had hurried down from the tower, the Yellow Knight leapt into the saddle and raised his gleaming lance.

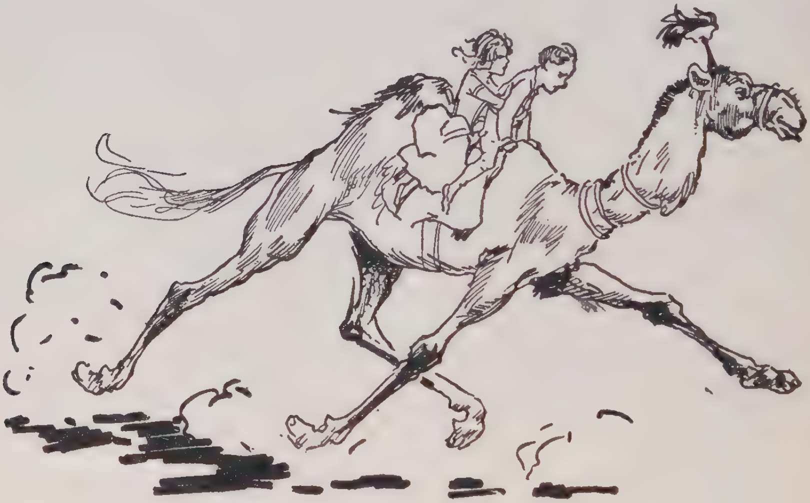
"I remember where I was bound before this enchantment!" he cried boisterously. "I ride to win the hand of a neighboring Princess. Countrymen, farewell! I will return with my bride."

"Oh!" gasped Marygolden. "Is he not of a marvelous handsomeness? Oh! Oh! He has forgotten all about serving me." And hiding her head on Speedy's shoulder, the Princess began to weep bitterly.

"There, there!" said Speedy gruffly, shielding Marygolden from the press of the crowd. "What do you care about this fellow? You're coming to America with me."

"But who'll show us the way?" wailed Marygolden, her tears falling thick and fast upon Confido's head. Speedy, not sure himself, stood on tiptoe to have a last look at the vanishing Knight, whom Stampedro had already carried to the gates, when he felt a tug at his coat. It was the Comfortable Camel, wild-eyed and furious.

"Let's go after them," screamed the Camel. "Let's try those other dates and see whether we cannot save him from himself. Are we going to lose Sir Hokus of Pokes just to please these Corumbians? Climb up quickly, youngsters. I can run as fast as any horse in Oz. Climb up, and we'll bring him back again!" Not sure that they could, but unwilling to let the Yellow Knight ride away without a word, Speedy and Marygolden stepped on a bench and thence to the high seat between Camy's humps. Next instant there were two clouds of dust on the highway. And Camy was as good as his word, for though Stampedro had a long start, never once did they lose sight of his flying heels. Breathless and banged about, Speedy and the Princess hung on to the sides of the seat and to one another, while Confido growled and snarled at the awful discomforts of the ride. At first, Speedy thought they were going through Samandra, but skirting the Sultan's desert domain, the Knight rode through a pleasant pastoral valley filled with tumble-



down and empty villages and towns, and after a sharp two-hour gallop came to a tall silver-trimmed castle. But it was as forsaken, forlorn, and deserted as the Castle of Corumbia had been the day before; every window was broken, and the courtyard was a wilderness of weeds. Dismounting slowly, the Yellow Knight looked sadly around, and as the Comfortable Camel came charging through the broken gateway he seemed scarcely to see him.

"All gone," mused the Knight. "And yet, surely this was the day set for the grand test of skill and courage."

"What are you talking about?" scolded Camy, panting and heaving with exhaustion. "Is this gratitude, I ask—running away from your old friends, and forgetting all about your former comrades? Come back to the Emerald City where you belong. You are Sir Hokus of Pokes and nobody else!"

"Don't you remember us?" cried Speedy, while Marygolden extended her arms entreatingly. But Sir Hokus looked through and past them, and even when Stampedro tried to remind him of his former companions the Knight turned uneasily away.

"I must see the Princess. Where is the Princess of Corabia?" he fumed, striding feverishly up and down the courtyard. "Where are the King and the Queen and all the others?"

"In the river," barked Confido spitefully. "Where did you suppose?"

"River?" sputtered the Knight, gazing fearfully at the stream running swiftly by the castle.

"Certainly," sniffed the little dog, resting his chin on Marygolden's arm. "When the Sultan changed the Corumbians into trees and bushes, he turned the Corabians into fishes and frogs. If you want to catch the King, you'd better get yourself a line and a hook."

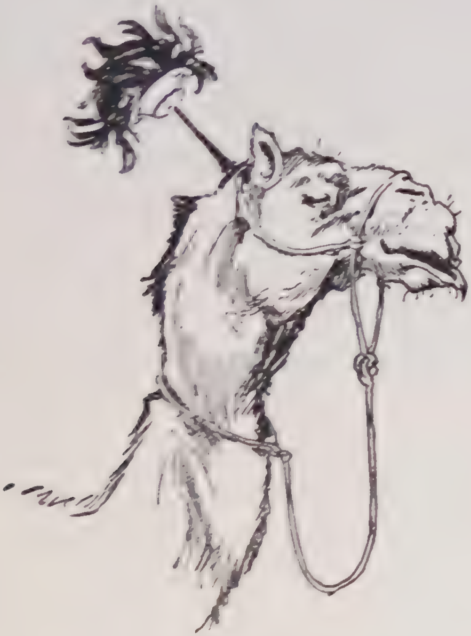
"Then that's what the other dates are for," marvelled Speedy, dragging the three remaining dates from his pocket. "One to restore the Corabians, one to restore the castle, and——"

"One to restore the Princess," finished Confido in a bored voice. "But why take all that trouble?"

"Yes, why bother?" groaned the Comfortable Camel, leaning against a tree. "Hokus doesn't know nor care for us. Let's go back to the Emerald City and see whether Ozma can bring him to his senses."

"But we really should help these poor people," sighed Marygolden, looking worriedly into the turbulent stream.

"Yes," agreed Speedy thoughtfully. "We really should." The Yellow Knight had withdrawn, and so heard nothing of the conversation, but Stampedro, trotting up to the depressed little group, tried his best to cheer and comfort them.



"The past must come before the present," he reminded them gently. "Give this young Knight time and he will remember you, and if you can help him further, I pray that you will. I, myself, will repay you and carry you back to America if need be, even though, once there, I may never speak nor see this fair land again." Touched by Stampedro's devotion to his master and his willingness to serve them, Speedy decided to break the last of the Sultan's evil spells. Confido, who seemed to take no interest one way or the other, drawled out instructions in a lazy voice, and Speedy, following these instructions, first ate the smallest date and cast the stone into the river. Instantly frogs' and fishes' heads in hundreds appeared above the surface of the water, changed as the watchers on the bank looked at them to people's heads, and presently as grand and colorful a company as had marched from the enchanted forest rose up out of the yellow river and proceeded quietly to the castle.

Hurriedly seeking out the King, Speedy explained as quickly as he could how the Sultan's enchantment had been dispelled. The King, who, Speedy could not help thinking, still looked a little like a fish, embraced the boy heartily and promised him half the Kingdom as a reward. But making light of that, Speedy, who was anxious to see the castle restored, begged the King to eat the second date and cast the seed upon a newly kindled fire in the dining hall. This the King was willing and ready enough to do, and as miraculously and swiftly as the Castle of Corumbia had been restored, the Castle of Corabia resumed its former glory and splendor. Speedy and Marygolden liked it even better than the castle they had just left, for the Corabian castle was of silver and crystal, and glittered and sparkled like a palace of ice. Having so satisfactorily restored his castle, the King returned to the courtyard to address his subjects. The Yellow Knight, in a dazed silence, had watched all the changes taking place before his eyes, and now urging Stampedro forward, approached the raised dais where the King and Queen, Speedy and Marygolden had taken their places. Camy, kneeling behind the two, peered out at his former hero with blurred and tear-dimmed eyes.

"I came to take my chance in the grand test of skill and courage for the hand of your daughter," cried the Yellow Knight, dipping the colors on his gold lance-tip to the King and Queen. At these words, four more Knights rode out from the crowd, repeating almost exactly the words of the Yellow Knight.

"Gosh, these fellows must have been enchanted along with the Corabians," decided Speedy, helping Marygolden to a place on an overturned flowerpot so she could have a good view of the champions, "and this test must have been planned the very day the Sultan's magic took effect."

"It was," snickered Confido, lifting his head curiously, "and what's more, the Princess is still enchanted and cannot be released until one of these Knights has passed the test and won the right to her hand. Ho, ho! Wait till they hear what the test is. They'll dash off in a hurry, even the brave Hokus, who pretends not to know us any more!"

"I'll wager he won't," asserted Marygolden stoutly. "I'll wager he will win this Princess. Dear, dear, how happy she will be to marry a Prince so tall and handsome."

"Sh—hh!" warned Speedy, touching her arm warningly. "The King is going to speak."

FOR THE HAND OF A PRINCESS

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"KNIGHTS and Princes!" The voice of the Corabian King sounded a trifle hoarse, due, no doubt, to his five hundred year immersion in the yellow river. "This grand test of courage for the hand of my only daughter, which has already been delayed five centuries by the meddling magic of our wicked neighbor, must be delayed still longer until the Princess herself has been disenchanted and restored to us. Has anyone present seen the Princess?" The King and Queen gazed searchingly over the heads of their assembled subjects, and Speedy, not wishing them to worry a moment longer than was necessary, stepped forward to explain.

"The Princess can only be released from the Sultan's spell by the winner of the contest," announced the King, after an earnest consultation with Speedy. "Kings! Knights! Princes! The fate of my only daughter is in your hands."

"Let the contest proceed!" roared the crowd, and the five contestants immediately galloped forward.

"State your conditions," puffed a Knight in green, holding his great white charger in check with difficulty.

"Oh! Oh! I hope our Knight wins," breathed Marygolden, clasping the Comfortable Camel round the neck, and placing Confido high on the Camel's hump, so he could see.

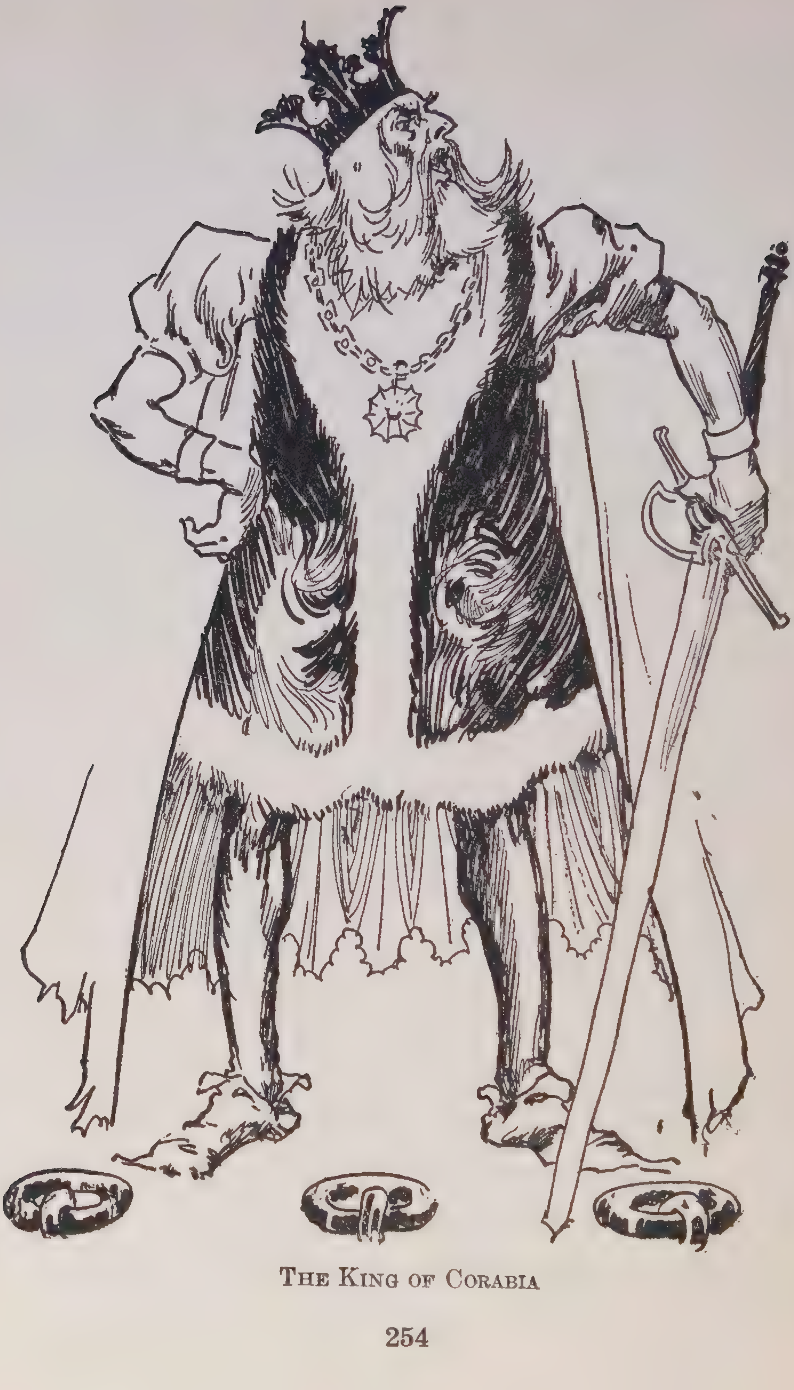
"Our Knight!" grumbled the Camel disdainfully. "Our Knight no longer!" But secretly and with great satisfaction he noted that the Yellow Knight was the handsomest of all the suitors.

"Atta boy, Hokus!" shouted Speedy, as Stampedro galloped smartly to the fore. Then a deep silence fell on the company as the King rose to announce the conditions of the grand contest, and when he finished a little shiver ran through the crowd.

"Beneath these three rings," the King told them, solemnly pointing to three brass rings in the silver flagstones at his feet, "there are three secret passageways. One opens into a bottomless pit filled with poisonous vapor, one into the cave of a seven-headed hydra, and one leads straight to the tower room of the Princess herself. Let each Knight choose his ring, and may the bravest among you win my daughter's hand!"

"But what of the others?" objected the Knight in green. "An honest battle I do not mind, but bottomless pits and seven-headed hydras! Nay, not for the fairest damsel that lives!" Touching spurs to his horse, he thundered away, leaving everyone choking in the dust he had raised.

"Poisonous vapor!" puffed a lordly fellow in red. "What chance has a brave man against such trickery? Adieu, I withdraw!" And withdraw he did, followed by a black Knight and a gray, who, without stopping to explain their reasons, cantered off so violently that they upset three guards and a stand of posies.



THE KING OF CORABIA

Chapter Nineteen

"Curses!" muttered Speedy, staring anxiously at the Yellow Knight, who all alone stood staring down at the fatal rings. "Suppose he rides off, too?" But the Yellow Knight had no such intention, and with a shout that reminded the boy of his old friend, Sir Hokus, he sprang lightly from his horse.

"The monster I will slay, and gladly, with the poisonous vapor I must take my chance, but this Princess must be saved at any cost, at any hazard, and come what may!"

"Hola! Bravo!" screamed the company, beside itself with delight. "Three cheers for the Yellow Knight of Oz." Marygolden, excited as any, tore off the rose Peter Pun had fastened to her shoulder that morning, and flung it impulsively down to him. The rose fell directly over the center ring and the Knight, looking up in surprise, caught Marygolden smiling at him.

"Good," he mused, thrusting the rose into his glove. "This little maiden whom I seem to know well, shall decide for me." And without pause or parley, he leaned forward and pulled up the center ring. There was a groan and creak as the trapdoor lifted, and the Corabians in the front ranks backed away as far as they could. But only a flight of silver steps led down from the opening, and as the Knight prepared to descend, the King lifted his scepter.

"My son!" cried the King joyfully. "You have indeed chosen well, for this passageway leads straight to the tower of the Princess. But before you go to break the spell that cruelly keeps her from our presence, I beg that you will lift these other rings." Much mystified, the Corabians began to mutter that such a request was not fair nor necessary. But the Yellow Knight, after a keen look at his Majesty, lifted first one and then the other. A great roar of surprise and then mirth went up, for there was nothing under either ring but grass.

"Odds muttons and buttons!" puffed the Yellow Knight, staring down in astonishment. "Was there, then, no monster or poisonous vapor at all?"

"None," smiled the King calmly. "But the man to whom I would trust my daughter had to be brave enough to take a chance—to risk anything for her sake. That you have done. Those craven cowards who rode away might have done it also. And now go quickly and claim your reward." Stepping down from his throne, the King gave the Knight the last date that Speedy had plucked from the magic palm. "Eat this date," he directed earnestly, "place the seed upon the ledge of the tower balcony, and instantly the Princess will be restored to herself, to us, and to you, her future husband. Is that not right, Confido?" The little dog nodded superciliously, and with a little sigh of expectancy the crowd watched the Yellow Knight vanish down the steps of the secret passageway.

"Well," said Speedy, squinting up at the balcony and feeling much as one does when the curtain is about to descend in the theater for the last time, "this clears up the last mystery, and after we see this Princess we might as well go home. Look, there's the Yellow Knight on the balcony now! He's eaten the date. Now I wonder whether the Princess will be pretty. I'll bet she's not as pretty as you are, Marygolden. Hey, say! Where did she go? Camy! Camy! Where's Marygolden?" But the Comfortable Camel was staring upward so intently that he did not even hear Speedy's question.

"Rice! Soup and cobblestone pie!" gulped Camy, stretching up his neck to its fullest extent. "Do you see what I see?" Still looking anxiously around for Marygolden, Speedy glanced quickly aloft and then gave a startled scream.

"Why, it's Marygolden! How did she get up there?

Curses Mickapplejuice! How can Marygolden be the Princess of Corabia? I found her my own self. She's my Princess and is coming back to America with me!"

"Guess again!" grunted the Camel dryly. As Speedy took another incredulous look, Marygolden put both arms round the Knight's neck and embraced him tenderly. Not since the Skyrocket flew off without Uncle Billy had Speedy felt so lost, strange, and forgotten.

"Gosh! Golly!" gulped the boy, winking fast to keep back the tears. "Gosh! Golly! Camy, we're the only ones left. I don't suppose Marygolden will remember us any more than Hokus did. Come on, let's get out of here." But so great was the crush that they could not move a step. All around them the Corabians were stamping and shouting with joy, and presently Marygolden and the Yellow Knight came down to greet the cheering throng. And now, to make matters worse, who should arrive but the King and Queen of Corumbia and Peter Pun in a white chariot drawn by twenty white horses. And then what a rejoicing and embracing between the two kingly couples, so long separated by the Sultan's enchantments! Marygolden, in her gold court dress and train, looked so tall and stately that Speedy could not believe she was the same girl who had gone through so many strange adventures with him. The Princess, after heartily embracing her parents and the parents of the Yellow Knight, began to look searchingly over the heads of the courtiers, and not seeing Speedy, who had stepped behind a silver pillar, spoke quickly to a page at her side. Blowing a shrill blast on his silver trumpet the page called loudly.

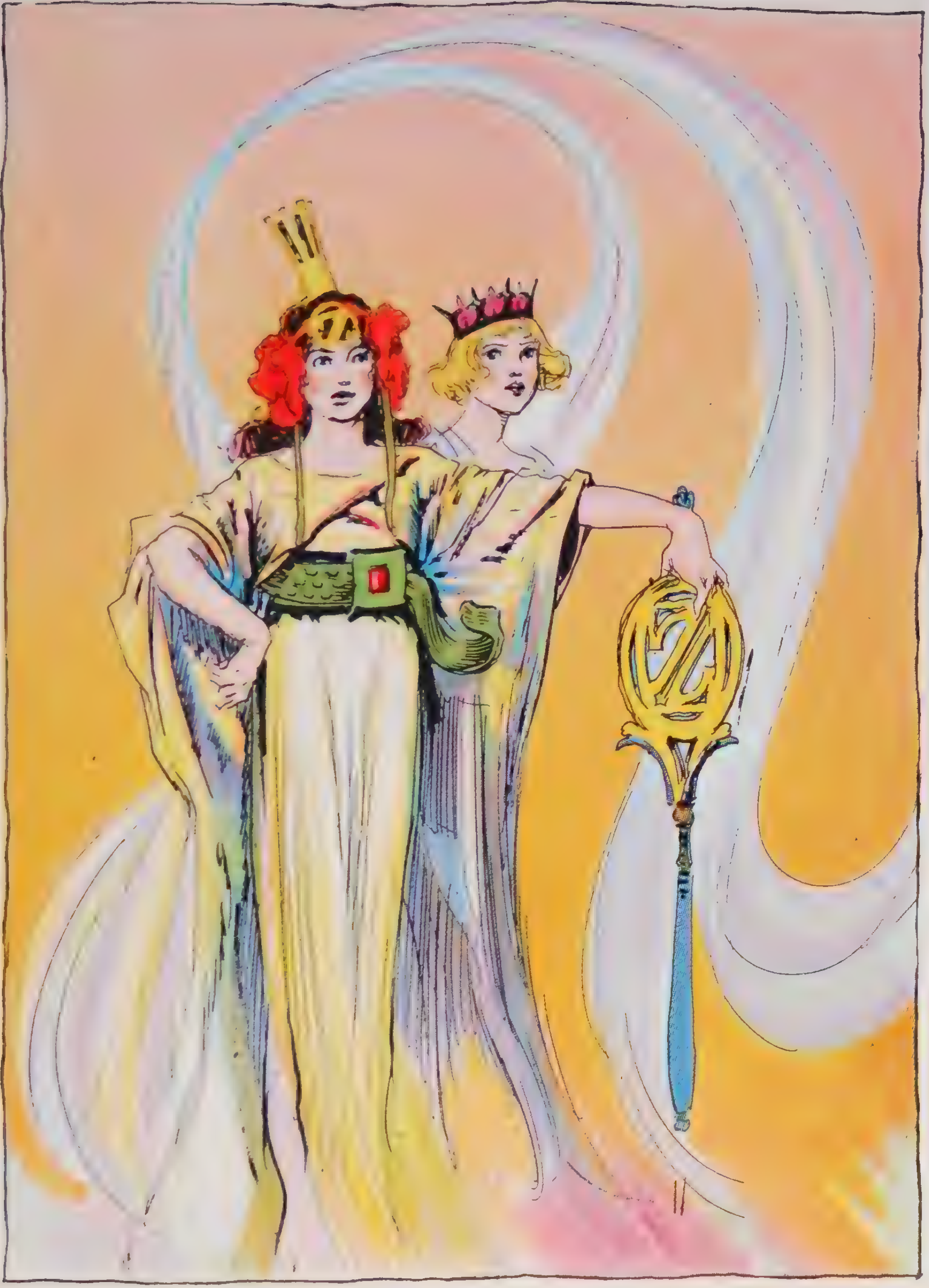
"Will the liberator of the Corumbians and the Corabians, the discoverer of Princess Marygolden, and the gentlest and bravest youth in twenty kingdoms be pleased to step forward? Speedy, the American, and the Comfortable Camel of Oz kindly step this way. Way for Speedy and the Comfortable Camel of Oz!" Speedy, turning red as a turkeycock, backed in embarrassment, but the crowd, quickly recognizing the boy who had given the magic dates to the King, boisterously pushed him forward, Camy treading in a dignified manner behind him. Then, to his surprise and delight, both the Princess and the Yellow Knight hurried forward to clasp his hands.

"Speedy!" cried the Knight, his eyes lighting up with the same kindly twinkle that had characterized Sir Hokus. "And Camy! Good old Camy! That enchantment acted upon me like a fever. Forgive me, if in the excitement of the present, I for a moment forgot the friends and allegiances of the past. Odds bodikens! I was bewitched, or I would have known Marygolden long ago."

"Soon as I kissed him he remembered everything," smiled the Princess, lifting Confido to a place on her shoulder. "Ah, Speedy, is it not wonderful? I, too, remember everything now. This is my real home and happiness, but I'll never forget the adventures we had together, nor the grand care you took of me when I scarce knew anything at all."

"Do you mind so very much if I take care of her now?" begged Sir Hokus in an anxious undertone. "You wouldn't want to marry for years, and a Princess might not be happy in America."

"I suppose not," sighed Speedy, staring up at the bewildering vision of loveliness that was Marygolden. "But I sorta wanted to show her my dog, and Uncle Billy's laboratory, and—and——" All at once Speedy was dreadfully homesick for a sight of Uncle Billy himself, for the pungent tang of Uncle Billy's pipe, and the queer smelling chemicals in the inventor's workshop. For the first time he felt out of place amid all this pomp and splendor. "I guess I'll be



"Why, it's Ozma!"—*Chapter 19*

going along," sighed Speedy, with a last, long, regretful look at the Princess.

"And I suppose, now that you have Stampedro, you'll not be needing me," choked the Comfortable Camel, bobbing his head sadly at the splendid figure of the Knight. "Good—good-bye! I'm going to take Speedy to the Emerald City and ask Ozma to send him home to America, and then—and then——" Camy tried hard to control himself but finally broke down and wept bitterly.

"Then you're coming straight back to Corumbia. Camy, Camy, you old son of a sandwich, d'ye think I could get along without you? Why, I'll need dozens of mounts! And besides, aren't you my best friend? And Speedy, my boy, surely you'll stay for the wedding?"

"And the reward!" puffed the King of Corabia, thumping Speedy heartily on the back. "Half my kingdom if you will stay with us!"

"And mine!" asserted the King of Corumbia, while Peter Pun begged Speedy to stay and share his tower.

"Oh, I couldn't stay always!" explained the boy quickly. "But I'd like to stay for the wedding! Shall we, Camy?" The Camel, who was crying comfortably down the Knight's back, nodded without speaking, and as Sir Hokus insisted that the marriage take place at once they all turned toward the castle.

But before they had gone a step there came a sudden and blinding flash of lightning. It played over the whole company, but settled like a spotlight upon the Yellow Knight and the Comfortable Camel of Oz.

"Mmm-magic!" stuttered Peter Pun, jumping behind the King of Corumbia. "Sss-somebody's making light of us."

"The Sultan!" burst out Speedy, rushing to the Knight's side. "What'll we do?" But before Sir Hokus (and somehow I cannot call this Yellow Knight anything but that) before Sir Hokus could draw his sword, the flash of light faded away. Then, as everyone began to breathe easily again, there came a second flash; two flying figures sailed over the heads of the crowd and dropped lightly before Marygolden and the Yellow Knight.

"Why, it's Ozma!" quavered the Comfortable Camel, lifting his head from the Knight's shoulder.

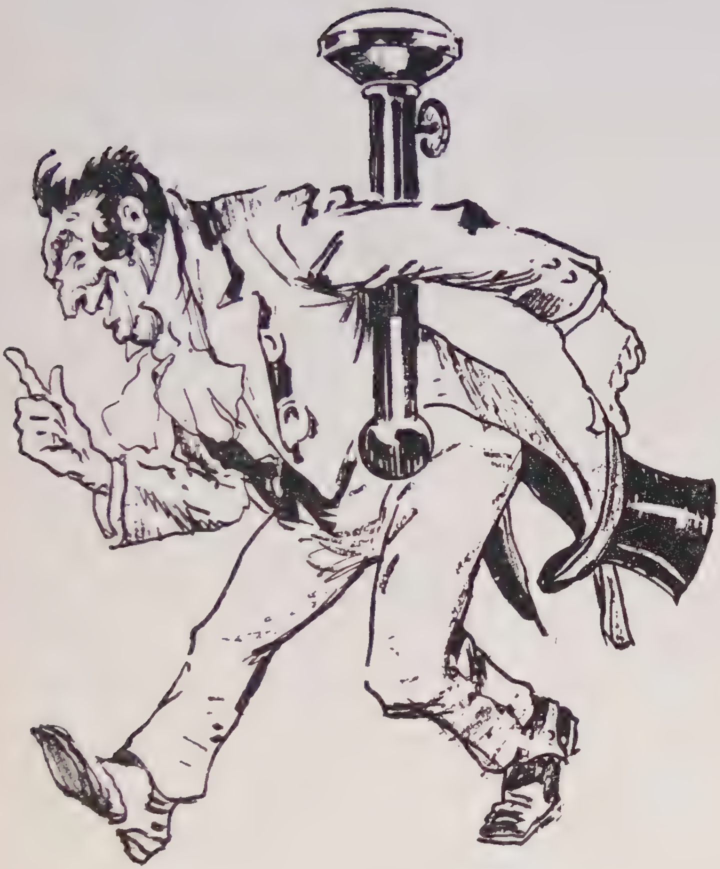
"Whose ma?" queried Peter Pun, coming out from behind the King. "Why, she's a mere child and no ma at all."

"She's the ma of this whole country, just the same," asserted Camy, shaking his head proudly. "Three cheers for Ozma of Oz and Princess Dorothy, her best friend and advisor!" The Corabians, although hoarse from cheering already, gladly gave three more. And concealing perfectly their consternation and surprise at the strange manner and suddenness of her arrival, the rulers of Corumbia and Corabia, with bows, murmurs, and many graceful genuflections, greeted the Supreme Sovereign of their whole magic and mysterious country.

THE MARRIAGE OF MARYGOLDEN

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE WIZARD OF OZ, as you have probably surmised, had finally perfected his searchlight. First it had discovered the magic picture stuck behind some books in Ozma's library. Sir Hokus himself had hidden the picture before he started on his quest, for he knew if it was in its place he would soon be found and followed. Then the searchlight, shot from the top of



THE WIZARD AND HIS FLASHLIGHT

the castle tower, had flashed back with the whereabouts of the Comfortable Camel and Sir Hokus. No sooner had Ozma discovered that they were in Corabia than she clasped on her magic belt and transported herself and Dorothy to that Kingdom.

"Here's Camy!" gasped Dorothy, somewhat breathlessly returning the bows of their Majesties. "But I don't see Sir Hokus. Well, anyway, the searchlight has found Camy."

"Found us both," corrected the Camel grandly. "There stands Sir Hokus of Pokes, really the Yellow Knight and Prince of Corumbia, with his bride, the Princess of Corabia. These, your Highness," Camy jerked his head respectfully in the direction of the Kings and Queens, "are the Sovereigns of Corumbia and Corabia and this boy, this excellent, courageous and adventurous American boy, is called Speedy, and in him you see the restorer of two kingdoms and a Prince, and the discoverer of a Princess!"

"How about me?" coughed Confido sharply. "I guess I'm as important as he is!"

"The Imperial Peke of Samandra, now official pet of Princess Marygolden," added Camy, with a broad wink at Peter Pun. Ozma smiled and nodded at each introduction but was so stunned and dazzled by the change in Sir Hokus of Pokes that she could for several moments find no words to express her astonishment.

"Is it really you?" she begged finally, standing on tiptoe to put her hands on the Knight's shoulder. "Yes, I can tell by the eyes. The eyes are the same. But wherever have you been and why did you go off without us? We have been so anxious and worried."

Sir Hokus blushed and looked uncomfortable.

"Because a Knight must go questing alone!" explained Camy, coming valiantly to the rescue. "And has it not been worth some worry, to have everything turn out so happily? Wait, just wait till you have heard our story!"

"Why wait?" cried the King of Corabia, who was consumed with curiosity to discover how Speedy had come to have the magic dates. "Why wait? Let us hear everything now."

"A story! A story! Enchantments and glory!
Ye Knights and ye Ladies, give ear—
Attend and turn pale, as ye list to the tale
Of Sir Hokus and Speedy. Hear! Hear!"

roared Peter Pun, shaking his belled stick hilariously. Ozma and Dorothy were only too anxious to hear, and when silver chairs had been brought for them by the footmen, the Yellow Knight and Speedy told the story of their exciting experiences from beginning to end. Ozma, like Speedy, could not help feeling a little sad to lose Sir Hokus. The Good Knight of Oz would be sadly missed at the castle. But she knew it would be selfish to wish for her old friend instead of this young and shining Knight, so happy in his release and future. As she sat musing over the whole strange story, Dorothy jumped up and impulsively kissed both the Knight and his bride.

"I understand everything," cried Dorothy, flinging out her arms, "everything except how Sir Hokus got to Pokes and Marygolden to Subterranea. How do you suppose they did, Ozma?"

"That," said Ozma, her lovely face suddenly growing grave, "we shall soon discover!" And touching her magic belt she spoke seven words under her breath. Speedy, who had dropped on a cushion beside Peter Pun, bounded up with a cry of alarm. The Yellow Knight jerked out his sword, and little gasps of dismay and curiosity burst from the lips of the onlookers. There, before Queen Ozma, stood the Sultan of Samandra, brought by the magic belt to answer for his crimes. At the moment of his summons, the fat and furious monarch had been riding at the head of his camel corps to attack the King of Corumbia. In his hand he still brandished a large, gleaming scimiter, and his face, distorted with rage, astonishment, and disappointment, was not pleasant to gaze upon.

"Drop that weapon," commanded Ozma sternly, and after one quick glance the Sultan, recognizing the Ruler of all Oz, sulkily did as he was told.

"Now," continued Ozma severely, "will you kindly explain why you stole the treasures of your two good neighbors and enchanted and transformed them and their children for five hundred years?"

"If the children of these two monarchs married, as they fully intended to do, the two Kings would have combined to crush me," whined the Sultan, shifting from one foot to the other.

"Nonsense!" blustered the King of Corumbia. "You know I had always the kindliest feelings toward you, nor ever suspected such base treachery at your hands."

"Were you the Black Knight who challenged Sir Hokus to combat the day he rode out to win the Princess of Corabia?" asked Ozma. Without meeting her eye, the Sultan nodded.

“And did you, by yellow and forbidden magic, send Sir Hokus to Pokes and change Marygolden to a statue and give her into the keeping of the Shah of Subterranea?” Again the Sultan nodded, and suddenly catching sight of Confido nestling in the Princess’ arms, gave a shriek of rage and jealousy.

“Wretch!” shrilled the Sultan. “Perfidious puppy, you have betrayed me!” Then, realizing he was in the power of a Fairy powerful enough to destroy him utterly, he grew still and rigid and gazed unhappily at the floor.

“What shall be done to this wicked person?” sighed Ozma, looking thoughtfully at the rulers of Corumbia and Corabia. “You who have suffered through his treachery shall pronounce his sentence.” At this the Sultan trembled so violently that his heavy gold necklaces and anklets rattled like a prisoner’s chains.

“Humph!” exclaimed the Corabian monarch, looking over at the King of Corumbia. “What say you, neighbor?”

“‘Well,” puffed the King of Corumbia, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, “this villain has robbed us of five hundred years, but, on the other hand, doubtless saved us from that many toothaches and hair-cuts.

Suppose we ask Queen Ozma to take away all his magic powers and appliances, force him to return all that he has stolen, and for five hundred years to stay within the boundaries of his own country?"

"Good enough," agreed the King of Corabia, and while Speedy and Peter Pun and some of the others who thought the Sultan had got off far too easily looked a bit disappointed, Ozma with a few magic passes rendered all of the Sultan's spells and wizardry useless. Then, as his presence spoiled the view and good spirits of an otherwise cheerful and charming company, she instantly transported him back to Samandra where he is doubtless complaining to Tuzzle or bullying the Grand Bozzywoz at this very moment. Confido and Camy without a quiver saw their former master vanish away. Then, with a satisfied sniff, Confido dozed off in the lap of the Princess, dreaming of all the gold bowls and collars he should require of the two Kings as a reward.

At high noon the marriage of Marygolden was solemnized with much merriment and magnificence. Speedy, in a suit of silver satin, with knee breeches and silver buckles on his shoes, looked, if not as tall, quite as fine as the bridegroom himself. Stampedro and Camy were decked out in enormous collars of roses in honor of the bride, and with so many Royalties present it was an affair long talked of and remembered by those lucky enough to be present. Sir Hokus, recalling his threatened wedding in

Marshland, smiled with satisfaction and happiness, for here, surely, was all the music, gaiety, beauty, and pomp a Knight could ask for, and a bride so fair and lovely that he wished himself a thousand times braver and more handsome than he was.

Ozma and Dorothy, cheered by the prospect of an early visit from the royal couple, found themselves growing as fond of the Yellow Knight as they had ever been of Sir Hokus; for in spite of his youth and gaiety he was really the same gentle, thoughtful, delightful person he had been always.

Speedy, looking down the long table lined with fine, friendly faces, realized that it was going to be hard to say good-bye. The boy from America had been knighted by both Kings and each had earnestly begged him to live always in the Land of Oz, but when the last song had been sung and the last toast to the bride had been given, Speedy leaned over and spoke a few words to Ozma. He found he could not say good-bye at all and wanted to slip away unnoticed and remember the bluff, merry company just as it was now.

"Tell them I'll come back," he whispered to Ozma. "Be sure to tell them that, but now I must be going home." Ozma, with an understanding nod, touched her magic belt. One by one, like figures in a dream, the courtly company faded out and next thing Speedy knew he was curled up on the old leather sofa in Uncle Billy's workshop.

"Why, hello!" said the inventor, looking up from a smoking test tube. "So there you are! I thought you'd be back soon. I knew nothing serious could happen to a nephew of mine."

"Did you, Uncle Billy, now, did you?" Vastly complimented, Speedy jumped up and gave him a regular bear hug. "But listen," he crowed excitedly. "Nothing serious did happen, but *boy* haven't I had neat fun?" And with the words tumbling out faster than water from a sieve, Speedy recounted the whole thrilling story of his adventures in the Skyrocket and afterward.

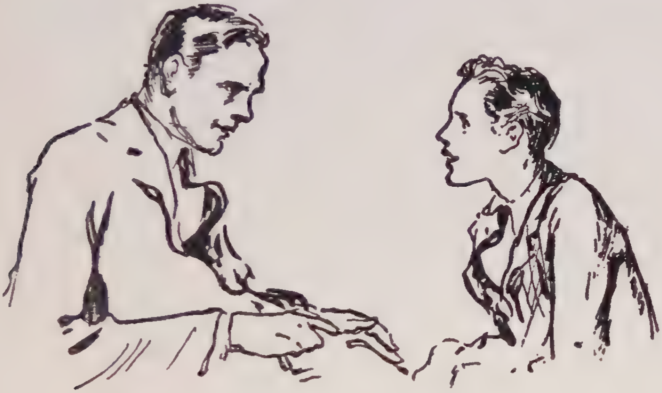
At each astounding happening, Uncle Billy, who had dropped into an old leather rocker, edged closer, so that by the time Speedy finished they were knee to knee, staring tensely into each other's faces.

"I'm building another torpedo ship," declared Uncle Billy, feeling around in his pocket for his pipe. "I was going down to rescue you, but since you are here, we can go to Mars or any other place you say when the new ship is finished." Speedy, his arm on the edge of the sofa and his chin resting in the palm of his hand, looked dreamily through the smoke of Uncle Billy's pipe.

"Well?" questioned the inventor, puffing away vigorously. "A penny for your thoughts, my boy!"

"I was thinking," sighed Speedy slowly and thoughtfully, "I was thinking that Mars would seem sorta dull after Oz."

"Ho! In that case," chuckled the inventor, who had been thinking the same thing himself, "perhaps we'd better go to OZ!" And someway, sometime, somehow, I believe they will, boys and girls, don't you?



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